

SERMONS - 1960  
PASTOR SHAHEEN

SAINT LUKE LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

SERMONS

1960

PASTOR SHAHEEN

January 3, 1960	"HANNAH'S PRAYER"	I Samuel 2:1
January 24, 1960	"THE HEART IS DECEIVED"	
February 7, 1960	"MAN WITH A BOOK"	Luke 4:16-20
February 14, 1960	"FROM HUMANITY'S OUTER EDGE"	Luke 4:16-20
February 21, 1960	"NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD"	Amos 8:11
February 28, 1960	"THE WORST IGNORANCE"	Jeremiah 8:7
March 6, 1960	"JOHN 3:16 - - GOD"	John 3:16
March 13, 1960	"JOHN 3:16 - - LOVE"	John 3:16
March 20, 1960	"JOHN 3:16 - - WHATSOEVER"	John 3:16
March 27, 1960	"JOHN 3:16 - - BELIEVETH"	John 3:16
April 3, 1960	"JOHN 3:16 - - EVERLASTING LIFE"	John 3:16
April 10, 1960	"PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS"	
May 1, 1960	"AS A SHEPHERD"	Ezekiel 34:1
May 8, 1960	"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"	
May 15, 1960	"LIKE A BOOK THAT IS SEALED"	Isaiah 29:11-12
May 22, 1960	"THE TIDE OF THE SPIRIT"	Isaiah 55:6
May 29, 1960	"FROM ON HIGH"	Isaiah 32:15
June 5, 1960	"THOUGHTS ON PENTECOST"	Acts 2:1-4
June 19, 1960	"TO YOUR CHILDREN"	Deut. 6:6-7
June 26, 1960	"THE FEAR OF THE LORD"	Proverbs 9:10
July 3, 1960	"GOD HAS NO FAVORITES"	Deut. 8:19
July 10, 1960	"TO SEE THE GLORY OF THE LORD"	Exodus 16:7
August 14, 1960	"TWO SONS HAD A FATHER"	Luke 15:11

SERMONS - 1960  
PASTOR SHAHEEN

August 21, 1960	"THE KING WHO CRIED"	Luke 19:41
August 28, 1960	"THE DIFFERENCE"	Luke 18:10
September 4, 1960	"THE CHRISTIAN WORKMAN"	Col. 3:22
September 11, 1960	"INTRUSIVE LOVE"	Luke 17:15
September 18, 1960	"THE GRATEFUL LEPER"	Luke 17:15
September 25, 1960	"GO -- TEACH --"	Matthew 28:19
October 9, 1960	"THE SOUL'S HARVEST"	Luke 12:20
October 23, 1960	"THE CHURCH AT WORK"	
October 30, 1960	"THE TRUE TREASURE OF THE CHURCH"	Acts 3:6
November 13, 1960	"THE DEVIL'S SIEVE"	Luke 22:31-32
November 20, 1960	"ADVICE TO A CONGREGATION"	Corin. 8:10
November 27, 1960	"THAT WE SHOULD BE SAVED"	Luke 1:71
December 4, 1960	"THE HOLY FAMILY - JOSEPH"	Luke 2:16
December 11, 1960	"THE HOLY FAMILY - MARY"	Luke 2:16
December 18, 1960	"THE HOLY FAMILY - JESUS"	Luke 2:16
December 24, 1960	"NO SURPRISE TO GOD"	Luke 2:16
December 25, 1960	"THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS"	Luke 2:15

## HANNAH'S PRAYER

This morning's sermon has to deal with one of the most remarkable women in the Old Testament. Her name is Hannah and, oddly enough, all that we know about her, at least for the most part, we learn as we observe her at prayer. Is there anything really unusual about that? For if you really want to know what a man is, observe him, if you can, while he prays....for prayer is like a candid camera for the soul. A man is really at his best or at his lowest when he falls upon his knees. This is particularly true of this woman called Hannah.

Let's turn, now, to those first two chapters in the first book of Samuel. It's one glimpse after another of this woman on her knees. The text, which is the basis for this sermon, is from the second chapter, the first verse, of the First Book of Samuel:

"And Hannah prayed and said thus to the Lord:  
My soul rejoices in God."

But Hannah did not always talk like that to God. That's one of the fine things about the Bible. It doesn't whiterash her saints--we get a picture of people exactly as they were. When your first introduction to Hannah comes, you will find her a woman who falls upon her knees in bitterness of soul....in soreness of heart....and with great anguish. She doesn't have a great deal of complimentary things to say about God or anybody.

Well, let's take a good close look at her now as we see her at the first. Hannah is a woman who had had a great disappointment in life. The thing that she wanted most was to have a child--a very natural desire for a good woman. But for one reason or another this had never come to pass. The burden rested so heavily upon her heart that she went to the temple and she prayed....in fact, some of the people who were in the tem-



## "Hannah's Prayer"--2

ple all of the time looked upon her as something of a nuisance. I think that's the way they must have reacted. One of the good men in the temple thought that she was drunken on one occasion....the very nature of her attitude and her spirit---how mistaken men can be!

And the first thing that we learn about Hannah in her prayer life is this....that being a woman of much anguish and bitterness, none-the-less, she came to God. It was her bitterness and anguish of soul and soreness of heart that brought her to God. Now, this is not always the experience of all people. It's been established, and sometimes most uncomfortably so, with those whom we love, that they get along very well with God as long as everything is pleasant, but when they become bitter, and when there is anguish of mind and heart, instead of coming to God, they use this as a kind of alienation, and they go away and they do not think about God at all.

This is the first glimpse that you get of Hannah upon her knees. She is driven to her knees because her heart is heavy; she is driven to her knees because she has bitterness in her soul; she is driven to her knees because of a deep anguish of her spirit. Let this be lesson #1 that comes to us from the page of Hannah's prayer life.....bitterness and anguish and soreness of heart should bring us to God rather than take us away.

And as you also observe her at prayer, and you focus the camera of your soul very sharply upon her, you'll discover that when she did pray to God, she named her problem. This is an exceedingly good thing...for not always when we come to God are we honest enough to tell Him just what our problem is. Generally speaking, He knows it....and generally speaking, because we are human as we are, we think that we can deceive God....and we, even when we pray to God, we talk about any number of

things than perhaps the thing that is precisely the sore spot.....not so with Hannah. She told God what her problem was. That's the second thing that we can learn from the page-book in the life of prayer of a woman called Hannah....driven to God bitterly and sorely, she tells Him exactly what it is that vexes her mind and her spirit.

And then, as she waits upon the Lord, believing, of course, that He will listen to her---and this is necessary in our praying experience---to believe that God will listen....there's something that I must tell you about Hannah which, in my book, is most praiseworthy....in that first chapter of the First Book of Samuel, when she prays to God out of the bitterness of her heart, and believes that God will listen to her prayer, she does not presume to know how God will answer.

Now, there again, you and I part company with Hannah. For quite often, you see, we presume to know what the mind of God is; and we think we know exactly how God should answer us. In fact, if we examine some of our prayers sometimes, we might be embarrassed to discover how much dictating we do to God Himself when we pray so earnestly. But in Hannah's prayer, in this first chapter of the First Book of Samuel, she uses the word "if." "If you should answer me," is the intention of her soul. She does not presume to know how God might answer.

Now this is exactly as it ought to be. For God is eternal and we are just a mere chapter in time....God is Infinite Wisdom---we are human and we are so foolish....God knows ever so much more than we can possibly conceive or understand. This is an exceedingly wonderful thing about Hannah--that in her prayer life, she should say, "if"...."I do not presume to know, God, how you are going to answer." It might be a surprising study to discover, even in your life or in the lives of the saints, how frequently the praying experience has bogged down because even while

#### "Hannah's Prayer"--4

we have prayed, we have presumed to know precisely what the will of God might be. Ignorance....complete reliance upon God's knowledge....might be one of the best things that we could offer God upon our knees.

And as you observe Hannah at prayer, you will also notice that when she prays, she comes out of her bitterness, believing that God will hear her: she names her problem by name; and then says, "If you will answer, God"....and she does something else that's salutary---she so examines her heart and her own mind that when God would answer her according to the desire of her heart, she makes certain that nothing in her life or her attitude will become a limitation to what God might proffer.

Is that part of the discipline of your prayer life and mine? Once we come to God....once we ask God for something....once we wait until He'll answer---do we then examine our souls to see if there is anything in us that might serve as a frustrating influence?--that might even thwart the hand of God, that would be gracious and would be generous. I think Hannah must have done that, because even before Hannah's prayer is answered, she has made up her mind that if God will give her a child, once she gets that child, she'll turn right around and give it back to God.

This, too, should be a part of the discipline of our praying. For when we ask God for something, I think God might say...."Now, just what is it that you want?"....and then He waits for us to name it again--as though we ourselves must be very certain of the thing for which we ask--and then we name it; and then maybe God will say again, "Now, just what is it that you want?" Now there is one thing also of which I am very certain--that God will not stop at that point. God, it seems to me, will also say this...."Now, if I give it to you, what will you do with what you get?" There is a wonderful economy in Providence. God has no desire to waste anything that He gives. God wants it to be used to good

## "Hannah's Prayer"--5

advantage. If He takes from heaven above to give to you and me who are here pilgrims on this earth, He has a right to expect us that we use what comes from heaven in a heaven-like manner.

To the everlasting credit of Hannah, she had searched her soul and there wasn't going to be anything about her that was going to serve as a kind of impediment to what she wanted so earnestly to get from God's hand. And then, once she asked it, she never wanted to forget it--and she called her son Samuel. You know, don't you, that in the Old Testament, they did a very fine thing--they always remembered the meaning of the names that they gave to them; and sometimes they called things certain names just because of what the experience might have meant. And when she received her child, she called him Samuel--and Samuel means "asked of the Lord," as though she never wanted to forget that as long as she lived, this blessing that she received, she received because she asked for it and God gave it to her....and since God was good enough to give it to her, she said, "God, you may have him--he's yours!"

This is Hannah's prayer life, as you get your first glimpse of it, and I suppose there's enough in this part of it to prick the conscience of many of us--but you can't stop at this point. The early verses of the second chapter of the First Book of Samuel are also a part of Hannah's prayer life, and in this chapter, Hannah isn't asking God for a single thing. Hannah does not reveal one bit of bitterness or anguish of soul. Now you get a glimpse of Hannah praying, and all that she does in this prayer is to tell God how wonderful He is. She isn't talking about herself now--she's not asking God for anything for Hannah....but she's singing the praise of God....."God, You are wonderful....I rejoice in your salvation....God, there isn't anyone like you....God, you are holy....God, you are like a mighty rock....God, you are the strength of all of us....."

"Hannah's Prayer"--6

Now Hannah reaches the highest point in the prayer experience...  
...in which the person who does the praying doesn't talk very much about himself, but he talks ever so much about God. This sermon is to be a mirror for each of us by which we get something of the reflection of our own prayer life. How frequently when we pray---all we do is talk about...  
....myself....my problems....my fears....my frustrations....my disappointments. All we do when we pray sometimes is talk about our weakness---the things we don't have. To reach this high-water mark in praying--when in my prayer life I talk about nothing else except how wonderful God is!

As your Pastor, I stand with you on this, the first Sunday in the new year. I would ask God to give to you what I would ask God to give to me---no prosperity that deals with things that we can touch and become a bank balance....desirable as all of these things may be, I am not so sure that right now that I would ask on your behalf for a measure of health or of wealth.....but this I think I must ask God in your behalf---that He would grant you a measure of prosperity of the soul...that come what may--wind or weather--sickness or health--prosperity or poverty .....that you might have so arrived in your prayer life, for the most part, when you talk with Him---you praise Him and thank Him.

In the Westminster Catechism--it is the basis for confession in the Presbyterian Church--the first question is this...."What is the chief duty of man?"....and the answer..."The chief duty of man is to praise God and to glorify Him forever." Maybe that might be the new thing for you and for me in 1960---when you'll thank God more fervently, and let Hannah, this remarkable woman from the Old Testament, become your patron saint in this respect...."and Hannah prayed and said thus: my soul rejoices in God."

*And I, too, shall rejoice in God all the days of my life -  
for His mercy is without ceasing" - Thoughts on the sermon*

Sunday, January 24, 1960

Pastor Shaheen

In all likelihood she was as attractive as any young Israelite maiden that Naaman had seen when on one of his recent raids he had gone for his king into Israel. He had taken her back afterwards and put her as a servant. In her household she naturally endeared herself. She knew her place; she accepted her menial assignments.

Could it be that one day when she was grooming the hair of her mistress that she made bold to whisper into her ear, What a pity that the captain of the king's host should be so afflicted. If only he could go to Israel and see the man there that I know, the prophet of God -- he could cure him.

Naaman, captain of the king's host, was a leper. Usually they talked about it in undertones. There were reasons. In the first place, Naaman was an unusually fine man. They used all kind of good descriptives when they talked about him -- Captain of the king's host; a mighty man; an honorable man; a man of much value. But everytime they talked about him, the sentence was never complete without adding certain other words: Captain of the king's host, BUT -----; a mighty man, BUT -----; A man honorable and full of valor, BUT, he was a leper. Naaman knew he was a leper, afflicted by this incurable disease. He knew that it was incurable. Inch by inch and hour by hour, even as day by day, he was a dying man.

The servant girl said, I know someone who can cure him, but he will have to go to him. There are some men who respect anything that is helpful, regardless of the source. And so Naaman took seriously what his wife's servant had proposed. He took it seriously enough that he even talked it over with the king, and the king who thought so well of his captain of the host said, I will tell you what I will do, Naaman. I will outfit you; you shall go in regal splendor, and I will even send a letter to the King of Israel, and we will see what will come of this.

So with all the grand outfit that becomes a king's representative, Naaman marches down through Israel into Samaria. The king read the letter. "What is this? How ridiculous. Do they think that I am God, that I can cure men? Does the king of Syria think I am in a position where I can work miracles? There must be some catch to this."

Word finally got around to Elisha, the prophet in Samaria, and the prophet sends word to the king of Israel and says, Send him down to me. Let him come. And as the scriptures say, Naaman, with all his chariots and horses now coming in regal splendor to meet Elisha, man of God, the man with the cure. And Elisha does not so much as come out of his tent or his house to meet him, but he sends word to Naaman: Go down to the river Jordan, dip yourself seven times, and you will be healed. Now Naaman was . Where is the preferred treatment to which I am entitled? Letters from the king, captain of the king's host, and this man who was supposed to cure me doesn't even come out and pay the respect to greet me, but he sends a messenger -- what foolishness, to dip myself seven times in a dirty, smelly river such as the Jordan. Why, even the rivers in Syria are far better than this one -- the Abana, the Pharpar. So he gets himself together, literally and figuratively, and was about to depart, when one of his very reasonable comes and reasons with him and says, But if the prophet would have suggested, would have said, that you do some great and significant thing, you would have done it, wouldn't you? Why do you hesitate to do such a little thing that he asks?

It made sense to Naaman, so he waded into the River Jordan. Seven times he dips himself into the dirty river, only to emerge fully cleansed and with skin as white and as tender as a baby's, cleansed and restored -- recipient of a miracle. He says now, I know that there is no God on all the earth like the God of Israel. Dressed in regal splendor, but a leper, he seeks a cure. It comes to him only in God's name.

Naaman has much to say to us. Let me go back and remind you that when men (?) spoke about Naaman they said, He was clean, honorable and respectable, but always the sad fact remains, he was a leper, with this incurable affliction to be cleansed and restored only by a miracle.

For our purpose this morning the remainder of this sermon should meet your condition and mine. Suppose we substitute the name Naaman by using our own. That should not be difficult, should it? We have been doing it for a long time in fact, for we, too, think ourselves clean, decent, honorable and respectable. I can say to you quite easily this morning that I have been here long enough that I think I could refer to those of you whom I have come to know as decent, clean, honorable, respectable people. That is why we sit so comfortably in this place. That is why we are so much at ease in the presence of these other people we may not know too well by name, but at least they look decent, clean, honorable, respectable. So we easily substitute my name for Naaman.

Now we ought to be consistent. We ought to do some other substituting, too. Instead of that word "leper" which indicated an incurable affliction of the flesh, substitute the word "sinner", which indicates an incurable affliction of the soul, so far as man is concerned. Naaman -- clean, decent, honorable, respectable, but he was a leper. You name yourself now as I name myself. --- Clean, decent, honorable, respectable, but a sinner.

It was the hardest job in the world, I presume, for Naaman, captain of the king's host, a mighty man of valor and honorable to the core, to accept the fact that he was a leper. God, it just can't be. On more than one occasion I have sat with people when they, too, have said, God, it just can't be. Other people, yes; but me, it can't be. But the undeniable fact remains -- Naaman was a leper.

We stand on common ground this morning. Do not let the elevation of this pulpit disturb you one bit. You and I are on common ground. The undeniable fact remains that you and I, while we may refer to ourselves as clean, decent, honorable,



and respectable, are sinners. You know that it is the business of the church to never let us forget it. That is why in this beloved Lutheran Church of ours that the first five or six minutes every Sunday when we come together we clear the ground at that point. That is the only thing we talk about for the first moments we spend together in worship.

Here I am again, O God, a sinner, in thought, word and deed. Here, I am again, O God, asking you to forgive me. Once the processional hymn is sung that introduces the service, we don't do anything else until we get squared off at that point. The Church says, This is the way it should be, for in the sight of God, we are sinners all.

I do not know what may be the high point of the worship experience for you on a Sunday morning. It could be for some of you the music; human as I am, I would be pleased to think that on occasion it could be the sermon; I should like to think that it would be the Pastoral prayer -- but I will tell you one place in which it should be found for all of us. The high point should be in having made confession of our sins we receive the assurance of divine pardon. The most wonderful thing that happens in this hour of worship every Sunday comes in those words declared with such reverence in this service this morning by the one officiating: The Almighty God grant unto you being penitent pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of His holy spirit.

The last thing that most of us want to think about is that we are sinners; that we should be doing things, or thinking things and living lives that become alienation between God and the human soul. The last thing in the world that we would like to think about ourselves is that it could be

Leprosy is an incurable condition of the human flesh. It can be cured only by a miracle. Sin is an incurable condition of the human soul to be cured only by a miracle, and that miracle is the grace of Jesus Christ.

And I tell you this morning that whatever else you may think about the human heart, it is black. They did no~~l~~ disservice to us when several years ago they talked about the total depravity of human nature. The Church is perfectly right in reminding us again and again that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that even for the most part, any good that we do can be damaged by selfish desire and ambition on our part. The Church is perfectly right in holding before us the Scriptures that declare that there is none righteous, no not one, save Jesus Christ. We are sinners all.

Martin Luther was perfectly right in his Luther Seal, that emblem that you find downstairs in ~~Biber~~ Hall. Quite frequently the heart is portrayed with black ink, or black paint. It is the heart of man; it is the source of evil. But we describe ourselves as clean, decent, respectable, honorable people.

Let me share this with you. I tell it from the pages of "Readers Digest" a decade and a half ago, perhaps; A Most Unforgettable Character: The village priest, the Roman Catholic priest in a village in France. He tells about the most repulsive character in the community who was always looked upon as a second-rate citizen. Deformed by nature, physically and mentally, I suppose, he frequently received the taunting of rascals who came from decent homes. They always threw in as a generous measure of jesting and ridicule the fact that this repulsive character has a sister, the town prostitute. They were most unmerciful, and one night when some of the town rascals were inebriated, they taunted him even to death. It was the village priest who found him and carried his limp form upon his back into the village church, and there they laid him out. And then he rang the tower bell and called the people to church. And when <sup>he</sup>~~she~~ went to the pulpit the priest said among other things words like these: In the last great day I shall face Him who was the shepherd of us all; He shall say to me: Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, Where are thy sheep? And I will not answer Him. And then perhaps He may say to me the second time, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, where are thy sheep? And I will not answer Him. And

if he should say the third time, Pastor\_\_\_\_\_, Where are thy sheep, then I will have to say to Him: I have no sheep. They looked like sheep, but they were sheep on the outside only, but inwardly they were as wolves. Decent, clean, honorable, respectable on the outside, but on the inside, we allowed this to happen. And with silence he went away from the pulpit.

Let me also share this with you from the pages of "Time" magazine within the last week weeks. A suburb in Chicago -- Someone had decided that perhaps it was not right that only so-called clean, decent, honorable and respectable people should live in that neighborhood and that maybe (and for our purpose this morning and only for our purpose this morning) they would allow perhaps a second-rate citizen -- he had a right to live in that community as much as they. And one came in. Some people who took this thing seriously -- about the depravity of human nature -- concerned not so much about the color black on a man's skin as the color black on the inside lining of a man's heart, they divided strategically and they went into the block at stake by teams of two. They devised a strategy that did not call for panic (?), that did not call for bombs, but they simply went from house to house and talked quietly, confidently.

With this rather safe distance between Montgomery County and Chicago, I try as best I can to assess the situation. I am not sure -- in their conversation they must have talked about the prejudice that simply existed in their hearts. They could not call it by any other name except that. I am not sure -- they must have talked about the fact that property values would deteriorate. I am not sure that they must have talked long about the possibility of the blight that could occur in their \_\_\_\_\_, but after they had done all of that talking, I am wondering if the issue of issues did not remain -- that it was not the question of whether or not there could be room on that street for someone who was a second-rate citizen; of whether or not there would be room in their neighborhood for a house to be occupied by a second-rate citizen, but eventually it came back to this uncomfortable

facet -- Is there room in our hearts? For the heart of man can be filled with prejudice, fear, jealousy and sin. And sin is anything that refuses to accept any man; sin is anything that refuses to acknowledge what God says; sin is anything that refuses to recognize the fact that God may have something to say.

A long, long time ago there was a man who came to a certain section of the world. Oddly enough, his color was not black, but he had the job of his life trying to get into men's hearts. History records that he never quite made it, and because of the evil in men's hearts they killed him --- because of the evil in men's hearts.

The only cure for leprosy was a miracle. The only cure for human sin is a miracle. And God says, I will do it for you. I can make your heart white, but it has to be my way. I can cleanse you; I can cure you.

Naaman wasn't so sure that he wanted to try it God's way, but it was only when he tried it God's way that he was cleansed. And I tell you this morning that you and I will be constantly bogged down on every front as long as you and I try to cure the evil in our hearts man's way, only God can do.

Two men went up into the temple to pray. The one, a Pharisee, the other, a Publican. The Pharisee stood up and prayed, O God, I praise thee that I am not as other men are, unjust, even as this Publican. I am clean, decent, honorable, respectable. And the Publican standing afar enough did not even as much as raise (?) up his eyes into Heaven, but smote his hands upon his breast and said: God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for he that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

# # #

## MAN WITH A BOOK

The sermon is entitled, "Man With A Book." The text is from the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, Portions of the 16, 17 and 20th verses.

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And they delivered unto him the book; and he opened the book and he read. When he was finished he closed the book and all the eyes of the people were fastened upon him."

Whatever pictures you might carry around of our Lord Jesus Christ, here is one I would suggest that you ought not to forget. Artists, unfortunately, have seldom turned to it as the subject for their canvas, but well they should; for any picture that you ought to have of Jesus Christ should include Jesus as the Man With the Book.

Let me give you the setting for the text. He had been brought up in Nazareth and was known as the carpenter's son. People on the streets remembered how he had come to their door, perhaps, and asked if Isaac could run along with him out yonder hill to see the sunset; he remembered, perhaps, the man next door, how the carpenter's son, Jesus, had brought little biscuits from the oven in his mother's hearth; or Rachael, when she was ill....they had precious memories of Jesus, the carpenter's son.

But now he had been separated from the community for some years. Word spread like wildfire that he had come back to Nazareth. Not at all strange--he had frequented the synagogue when he was there before--this is the likely place in which to find him. A small crowd of people, I presume, must have gathered outside the doors of the synagogue....."Sure, I'd recognize him anywhere--it's Jesus, Joseph's son---sure, it is".....and they watched rather closely. And then there was observed a very fine custom in the synagogue---the deacon in charge, when it came time for lessons to be read, would call, perhaps, upon a visitor....and his eye fell upon the carpenter's son.

"Jesus," he must have said, "We'd be honored indeed if you'd read the lessons this morning, or this evening," and so Jesus took the book that was delivered unto him and he read, and then he closed the book and all of the eyes of the people were fastened upon him....Jesus....Man With the Book.

I come here standing behind this book this morning to remind you that at perhaps every significant junction point in history, the world has followed, for good or for evil, the man with the book. Man with the book....can you think of Karl Marx, aside from his Das Kapital?....can you think of Charles Darwin, without his "Origin of the Species?....can you even think of Adolph Hitler, without his Mein Kampf?....can you think of the Apostle without his Epistles?....can you think of Melancthon, the theologian, without his (Losa)?....can you think of Martin Luther, giant of the Reformation period, without having in his hand the Bible which he translated, which became his most significant contribution?.....can you think of Martin Niemöller, brilliant, daring Lutheran pastor, who for eight and one-half years was the personal prisoner of Adolph Hitler in Dachau in Buchenwald...and they come to refer to him as the prisoner--"the man with the book"--who would stand on something, getting himself as close as he could to the window, and then, day by day, he would call out to the prisoners who were exercising in the block--a verse.....the good word for the day....Martin Niemöller--the man with the Book.

As spiritually profitable as any book that one might read is "Unwilling Journey," the diary of Helmut Gullwitzer, another Lutheran pastor held by the Russians at the close of the war and for four-five years he goes from one prison camp to another, and then he records the experiences from the depth of his soul, and you get this picture of Helmut Gullwitzer, always the man who could appear as the most forlorn of all men, if there should be taken away from him---his Book.

I can be standing, it seems to me, in the shadow that's been cast over our world since October 4, 1957. It was on that day that the first man-made satellite

was launched. The world hasn't been the same since. The mind of man has been completely captivated and intrigued by the fact that the man is now living who will some day land upon the moon, and the symbol for our age is fast becoming--- 'man soaring into outer space'....this is the symbol for contemporary man.

On Madison Avenue, it's "man with the brief case;" in one laboratory after another, it's "man with the test tube;" but I would remind you that again and again, at almost every significant junction point in history, for good or for ill, the world has followed the "man with the book," and of all the pictures that I would want you to remember of Jesus Christ, I would ask you to remember that day in Nazareth when he's portrayed as the Man With The Book.

The text has three very simple things to tell us. First of all, the book was delivered unto him. This reminds us at once, doesn't it, that all truth is objective--it comes to us. We don't have ideas--ideas lay hold upon us--they grasp us. Even our Blessed Lord, when He began His ministry, began with something that was given to Him. I sit at my desk to prepare a sermon and I look round about at the books that occupy the shelves in my study and I say to myself, with complete honesty, "I am debtor to so many--so many minds from so many places through so many years!"

It would be a poor man indeed who would even begin his own religious experience--from within himself. For the earnest believer....he begins his religious experience as the man with the book--this thing which has been given to me. So I would picture for you Jesus Christ--as a symbol for all of us.....Man With The Book.

The second observation that shouts at us from this text is the fact that, having had the book delivered to Him, He opened it and He began to read. Now, this is far more important, perhaps, than simply having the book in your hand. In Gettysburg, where I had the great joy of spending three years of my life as a student on the Hill of the Prophets, I would go by, ever so often, the college church--Christ Lutheran Church in down-town Gettysburg has a series of steps that leads from the pavement to the main entrance. Now Gettysburg, as you know very well, is a community that literally and figuratively is studded with monuments....heaps of bronze and marble and granite

ever so often meet your eye--and so it's not at all unusual that you should even find a marker or a kind of monument at the first step that leads to the main entrance of Christ Lutheran Church. Now it so happens that this monument is a kind of pedestal upon which is placed the symbol of a book. During the battle of Gettysburg, the beloved pastor of Christ Lutheran Church was killed by some stray bullet; and so they've remembered it in that way.

But it serves as a meral, my friend--it's the Bible upon the pedestal--and that's where a good many people would keep the Bible.... with veneration and with respect, of course....but upon a pedestal, as ~~then~~ though just having it around, somehow, might work its own magical influence upon people.

During those memorable war years, I used to go down to the railroad station and when a lad from my parish had gotten a call, I'd be there to bid him farewell; and as he would head for camp in this new venture of his life, I would slip into his hand, fervently as I could, a copy of the New Testament. I was always a bit embarrassed and I must confess, a bit disappointed, when "Johnny" came marching home, and, with a measure of pride and satisfaction, he would take from his pocket the New Testament, almost as unsoiled as the day I gave it to him....and yet it seemed to him, did it not, as a kind of talisman that would guarantee, as long as he had it right here, safety and security.....a Bible--a book closed, yes....upon a pedestal, yes.....treated with veneration and respect--- but a closed book.

I think I can understand why Chapman, in his book called, "The Jungle Is Neutral," tells how when he went in the last war to Malaya, and they found themselves pretty well protected from the guerrilla warfare that was waging in other parts of the section of their country and they had time on their hands; and he decided he would do something that he had been wanting to do for a long, long time---he would read the New



Testament from cover to cover--and he took it only to put it away.... somehow or other, it was a strange thing to him--it had remained closed too long; and frankly admits that they took the thousand pages of the Oxford Dictionary and went through its pages from cover to cover, to pass the time....and the Bible remained unread....respected!... ...a talisman!.....but unread.

Jesus, when the book was delivered to Him, took it and opened it and read it. They tell me that when you travel to Moscow you might have the opportunity to visit the Anti-God Museum; and you'll find in the Anti-God Museum, relics, as they refer to it, of a by-gone age--- symbols of the witch-doctor; cures worked by magic; incantation parchments; and they'll also show you....a chalice....and a copy of the Bible--from an age of superstition--from an age when the Bible was venerated and respected....but remained closed....the Bible upon a pedestal.

It's one thing to picture Jesus Christ as the Man-With-A-Book--- it's another thing to see Him as the Man with the Book that was open.. ...and I should cherish the thought that when, under God's plan, I should have run my course as your Pastor, that of all the pictures that might come to your mind of this one Pastor in your midst, I should be happy indeed if you might remember me as the man who stood behind an open Book; who Sunday by Sunday came here and asked you to hear God's Good Word unto the edification of your souls.

Man-with-the-book must be man with the open book....but once the book has been open, one may remember that Jesus Christ closed it, and one ought also remember that when He closed it---all the eyes of the

people were fastened upon Him. You have never read your Bible completely or perfectly if once you have read it, you have not been confronted by Jesus Christ. You have never read your Bible completely or perfectly, save once you've read it, you cannot help but fasten your eyes upon Jesus Christ. It was Martin Luther who said, "The Bible is the cradle of Christ." It was Martin Luther who intimated that it is the Bible that must lead us to Jesus Christ.

A Dr. Chirdwin wrote for the United Bible Societies in the United Kingdom, a very interesting book called "The Bible and Evangelism." I had a notion that with a great measure of delight he endeavors to show, in his book, that the Bible is the "cutting edge for the evangelist." It is the Bible more than any one instrument that he may have by which men are led to Jesus Christ. He has some very interesting illustrations. I would like to share one or two with you right now: He tells how a man in Minas, Brazil, had been given a copy of the Bible....a strange book....he takes it home; and when he gets home he discovers that the fire in the fireplace is going out, and being a man of a practical bent, he determines to kindle it anew; he takes the first piece of paper that he can reach, which happens to be this book--the Bible. He opens it quickly and miraculously enough, his eyes fall upon the page to which it's opened---it's the Sermon on the Mount---and he reads....he continues to read until two o'clock in the morning; he is confronted by Jesus Christ....and at two o'clock in the morning, it has been established as a matter of fact....he says, "I believe in Jesus Christ!"

The author of the book also tells how in Chile the waves had

washed ashore certain pages from a book and the man comes and finds one of them and he takes it home and he dries it and he reads it.....it introduces him to Jesus Christ and his life is changed. This is the power of the Book....this is the cradle of Christ....and when Jesus Christ had finished reading, all eyes were fastened upon Him.

These men to whom I referred a moment ago were men who had been denied the privilege of Bible School training--they were men who had not grown up in a home where the Bible received a place of veneration and respect--they had certain disadvantages, all of their lives, until one day they had the Scriptures.

For shame upon you and me!....we who should always be known as "people of the Book"; we've been brought up in the culture of the Scripture; 99% of those of us who are here now grew up in an environment where the Bible School was the accepted thing in the community in which we lived. Has all of this brought you to Him who is the Living Word? Has all of this brought you to a confrontation by Jesus Christ?

"Beyond the sacred page  
I seek Thee.  
My spirit pants for Thee,  
O Living Lord"

Fortunate is the child who has been brought up in the home where there has been a grandmother, Whistler-fashion--who, whenever he thinks of her now, he thinks of her as the saintly soul-with-the-Book. But more precious indeed is that person who, when he thinks of any sainted soul, would think of them as the person with the Book, because what was written on the book was also written on the inner lining of their hearts. The world could be changed by you, my friend, if you could become the symbol, the earnest believer, of the Man-With-The-Book.

"FROM HUMANITY'S OUTER EDGE"

The sermon this morning is entitled, "From Humanity's Outer Edge," and the Scripture lesson is the same Scripture lesson which served as the basis for last Sunday morning's sermon. It is well that you should hear it again, from the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, beginning with the 16th verse:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.  
And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,  
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,  
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.  
And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.  
And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.  
And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.  
And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

I presume no matter how old we may become, or how often we may move, essentially we remain "home-town" people at heart. There is always something about the place in which we spent the formative years of our lives <sup>which has</sup> ~~that~~ had a peculiar and a particular tug upon our hearts and our minds. That's why, I presume, very easily you and I associate ourselves with Jesus Christ this morning, when He returned

to His home town--the town in which He had spent the formative years of His life.

Now it's an interesting thing that when you say going back to your home town, you also note that when Jesus went back to His home town--"as his custom~~s~~ was", He marked the path that led to church. ~~Now,~~ You can say both of these things in the same breath, for the undeniable fact remains that in our home town, spending there our formative years, we establish the set of our character. It could be that for most of us, as we spent our formative years of our life in a home town, that it was there and then that we began to forge the characters that we have become. So significantly then, it can be said that He went back to His home town and, as his custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.

You can well appreciate, can't you, the parent who discovered that his eldest had become eighteen years of age; and it occurred to him, as it had not occurred before, that whatever active influence for good that he as a parent might have upon his son, that those days now were gone, Once the boy reached eighteen and, leaving home, was pretty much on his own; and the awesome thing happens then in the life of the parent, where he sits back and he waits, as he watches, to see the set of the character and the pattern that the person will take, once these formative years are over.

Jesus Christ, the set of His character having been established, goes back to His home town, and, as His custom was, He went to the synagogue on the sabbath. "Ah," you say quickly to yourself, "Dare I believe that Jesus Christ was a creature of habit?...Do you mean to tell me that there are some things that He did routinely?....just be-

cause that's the way He had been brought up?".....Yes, I think I would tell you that--and I, for one, am not disturbed by the fact that it is true--for in every good Jewish home, children are brought up on that basis. You read these early pages in the Bible and you can see for yourself, especially in Deuteronomy, how again and again there were certain things that were done in every home, that those who were young, as they became older, would not depart from the pattern of their youth. There were some things that were specifically taught, in order that they might become a matter of habit in later years. There is nothing wrong with a person who remains good "habitually.".....indeed, he is fortunate if he remains good by habit.

But this is not to say that Jesus Christ went to church by habit and then went through the service routinely; this is not to say that Jesus Christ might pray the Lord's Prayer as you and I might pray it and just simply go through it by rote. Ah, no! He had been brought up--it became a habit with Him to mark the path that leads to God's House--but I am willing, as one, to believe that every time He worshiped, He projected Himself into the experience--it became a living and a vital thing. He did not do it routinely when He prayed or when He read the Scripture. This particular passage of Scripture speaks the lie at that point, for this is far from being a routine matter when Jesus Christ goes to church, reads the Scripture lesson and then says, "I tell you that today this scripture has become alive." He might have gone to church by habit, but He did not practice His religion by rote.

He must have shocked the people in that synagogue when He said,

"I want to tell you something."

"I've been reading to you about the poor."

"I've been reading to you about the broken-hearted."

"I've been reading to you about people being held captive."

"I've been talking to you about blind people."

"I've been talking to you about people who have had an injustice dealt against them."

"I want to tell you something..... Today this scripture is going to be fulfilled.....Today!...in this place!...and by me!"

It must have shocked them. They weren't accustomed to having somebody stand up in church and say...."Well I'm going to do something about it!" They weren't accustomed to having people come to church and having someone say...."I'm going to identify myself with the problem!" They weren't accustomed to having God become terribly, uncomfortably contemporaneous. For a lot of people, God is perfectly all right as long as you keep Him between the covers of this Book. For a lot of people, God is perfectly all right as long as you keep Him back there....then, and at that place. But that time, Jesus said, "The scripture is going to come alive---through me!"

I hesitate to use the word, but I don't know what better word to use for the moment. It was unexpected that He should speak this way--it was almost unnecessary that He should speak this way--because He happened to be in Nazareth; and the people in Nazareth lived in a little world all of their own. They weren't accustomed to getting involved with the rest of the world. Nazareth is like a little cup. It's a hollow depression in the terrain. On the outer edge of Nazareth

is where the rest of the world is. As a lad, He must have gone up to the hills; and as He looked from beyond the hills, He could have seen the history of the past.....

....the Plain of Esdralon, where every major force has, at one time or another sent an army to march--where one battle after another have taken place....

...From the hill-top of Nazareth, He could see Mount Carmel, where Elijah did battle with the Baal-worshippers.....

...From the hill-top of Nazareth, He could see the place where Saul had been defeated in battle.....

...From the hill-top in Nazareth, He could see the place where Jehu had slaughtered Jezebel.....

...From the hill-top in Nazareth, He could see the past.....

And from that same hill-top, He could see the contemporary world---three major routes connecting all the important areas of the then-known world---as they passed within eye-sight of a hill-top in Nazareth.

But Nazareth was a little depression, like a cup between the hills....all by itself....and the rest of the world was on the outer edge.

But here you find a man--a carpenter's son--who stands up in quiet, peaceful Nazareth, and who says, so it would seem,

"Out there.....there are blind people.....

"Out there.....there are captives.....

"Out there.....there are people being hurt.....

"Out there.....there's injustice.....

"And I tell you--I'm going to identify myself with that problem--



"I'm going to make God come alive in my soul....because if God were here right now, He wouldn't tolerate injustice.....

"If God were here right now, He wouldn't allow people to be cast into prison without cause.....

"If God were here right now, He'd want the poor and the under-trodden to be defended.....

"Today.....in Nazareth....I tell you....I'm identifying myself with these problems.....of these people!"

I read with more than ordinary interest about an interesting chap in the middle-west, who had printed in modern-day format certain paragraphs that he had lifted bodily from an ancient document (I say 'ancient', comparatively speaking), and he had these paragraphs distributed among his friends; and when they found out that he had distributed these pamphlets and they thought that he had written these statements, they said....."You're a radical!"....."You're a revolutionary!"....."You shouldn't talk like this!"

Now, the truth of the matter is, he had taken bodily from the Declaration of Independence of the thirteen colonies, back there July 4, 1776, certain statements, and when they appeared in every-day printing, terribly contemporary, people were frightened. And yet that same fellow, had he gone to a political meeting, or a "Save America" conference, and would have unrolled, very reverently, a parchment scroll, and would have read there from the Declaration of Independence, everyone might have applauded and said...."Yes!....This is wonderful!" That was then! And that was there! It's only in succeeding generations that we put halo around the head of the radical and the man who wants to identify himself with something that, up to

that point, has always remained the status quo.

Do you catch the significance of this thing now? Jesus Christ, coming as the carpenter's son and saying, "I want to do something about this....." "I want to identify myself with a problem!"..... This sermon this morning has been planned and prayed over very deliberately; and it comes, essentially, as a background for a little pamphlet that you ought to pick up when you leave Saint Luke Church this morning. You will find it at the entrances to the nave.

For a number of months, the ministers and the rabbis who belong to the Silver Spring Ministers Association have been wrestling with a problem. It has been laid upon their hearts that something should be said. I, for one, I do not hesitate to tell you, have raised one question after another in these deliberations....and at several meetings I have been a lone dissenter--cautioning, what seemed to me, a bit of wisdom here and there. But the fact remains that something should be said about a problem that raised its head in our community.

I'm not so sure that the statement is a perfect statement. To get thirty-some preachers and rabbis to agree to one thing--is almost incredible. But my name appears with the statement because I am convinced that when something should be said, even though it is said poorly, it is better that something should be said than to remain silent.

Now, this is the actual situation: About a year ago, I think it was, time passes quickly, in one of the very fine sections of our community, there was a man of much culture and much learning who decided to purchase a property. He had more degrees, I suppose, than most of us might ever hope to have--a doctor of medicine--a professor in sur-

gery, as I understand it, in a well-known university. He wanted to purchase a house that I presume is in a neighborhood of 30 to 35 thousand dollars. He had a desire to live in that section. Now there's nothing wrong with a person wanting to buy a house if he has the money to pay for it. There's nothing wrong with a person of culture and learning wanting to live, perhaps, in an area that becomes that type of thing. But it so happened that this man's color of skin was considerably darker than the other people who lived on that street. You know exactly what happened. The type of thing happened on that street, I understand, that would happen had you lived there.

The people were rather disturbed.....immediately they saw all the problems that could be involved.....

....to live next door to a Negro, when we're not accustomed to living next door to a Negro.....

.....to have conversation..... to fraternize.....

.....to be in his home---which is done sometimes, where people live in the same neighborhood.....

....but more important, I suppose, was the economic factor...the deterioration of the value of the property, which seems almost invariably to become a part of the picture.....

With all my heart and soul, I can enter into the anguish of those people, and one of them I know quite well.

What does one do?.....What does one do?.....

I am happy to tell you that, to all intents and purposes, the problem is being resolved; and chances are it will be fully resolved when, one day, a youngster will be run over on that street and they can't get a doctor soon enough....and this doctor might be the one

to bring the necessary, desired touch--it might be resolved wholly at that time.....I don't know..... but, at any rate, everyone's still living on that street, I think.

Now, the Silver Spring ministers and rabbis were confronted with this fact.....should something be said?.....

.....or shouldn't something be said?.....

With all my heart and soul, I believe that people want guidance. I cannot tell you how the problem will be resolved---I do not know. I only know that if I would pose as a prophet, that again and again the problem will arise. There is no magic line at the District. Now, when it does arise, will it be faced with wisdom and with Christian love?.....and may we, who constitute the Christian community, find ourselves in the position of dealing earnestly and patiently with it?

On Friday evening of this past week, several of us were privileged to witness what, in my book would be, if I see nothing else, the finest thing that the American stage has produced....Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine....acting at its best. They had a tremendous theme in "The Visit," which was the play. If you do not know about it, let me tell you something about it right now.

A town somewhere in Europe is visited by a girl who had grown up in that town....by a woman, now, who had been a girl in that town. The town had been suffering an economic blight;....the trains no longer stopped--they go straight through....the factories had laid off workers--one after the other. If only the town could be rehabilitated, economically. And so they hope and pray that when this woman comes back to her home town, having amassed millions, someone

might tap her, give her the pitch....and then she'd do something about their town.

She visits the town.....she seems to be touched by their economic blight.....she makes a bargain.....

.....She will give one million marks to the town, five hundred to rehabilitate industry and five hundred to be divided among the people of the community--on one condition.....that the town sacrifice the life of one of its citizens.....that the town guarantee her the death of one man.....

It so happens that this woman, at the age of seventeen, seven months being pregnant, was forced to leave the town. At a court trial, a man in that town had paid witnesses to lie. The court had decreed it--the man whom she charged was not guilty. In the course of the years, Anton Schill had become the respected citizen in the community--next in line to become burgomaster.

At first, they refused the offer; but being a woman knowing ~~in~~ the ways of the world, she said, "I can wait;"......and the rest of the play is waiting.....and you see how the whole town's people, even to a man, turns against Anton Schill and, as the play ends, a check for one million marks is handed over the dead body to the burgomaster.

Why do I tell you this? Because I, for one person, sat there terribly moved--for two reasons. You are brought face-to-face with the awesome fact that when evil seeks revenge, and when even evil seeks justice without mercy....the net result is evil. That was the theme of this terrible play--evil wants justice, but without mercy.

The second thing that brought me a great deal of discomfort-----every now and then throughout the play, the town Pastor appears; and

never--never did the town Pastor raise his voice against the evil that was taking hold upon these people; and even when the town council met, he voted with all the rest to accept the diabolical offer of a wicked woman.

I do not know the extent of injustice that might prevail in Silver Spring. I know that we have sent hundreds upon hundreds of our precious young men to the far corners of the world to die....because we said we want to cherish certain freedoms....that every man has certain inalienable rights.....

.....And then I said to myself...."If we can sacrifice the flower of American manhood on foreign shores for the freedoms that ought to be guaranteed men, how can we remain silent if certain freedoms should be denied certain people at home?"

And then, as a child of God, how could I remain silent--if this thing could happen to another man, who is also the child of God?

I do not know how the problem will be solved. I do not know how soon you may have to face it. I only know that it can happen here---it has already happened.

I know elsewhere there has been panic.....I know elsewhere the people themselves have contributed to the deterioration of property values, because they've become frightened.

I only know that, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, it calls for wisdom and a measure of Christian love.

"NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD"

The sermon, based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day, is entitled "Not a Famine of Bread." The text is the 11th verse of the 8th chapter of the prophecy of Amos:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord"

It seems to me, I could be wrong, that despite your first impression of Amos as a preacher, I'm not so sure that you might go back a second time to hear him preach. I am perfectly willing to believe that as he would stand up to preach, at least for 75% of his sermon, he would have held you in the hollow of his hand-- he would have captivated your mind and your spirit--you would have been thrilled; and I think, as he came to the end of his sermon, you'd have become a bit uneasy, and you might have made up your mind....."Well, I'm not so sure that I'll come back again."

Amos was rough and rugged. Astute and clever, he possesses a deep insight into human nature. This is the way he came preaching. He'd assemble his congregation wherever he could and then he'd begin to tell them about their neighbors to the north...."You know those people who live up there---they're wicked people---they do evil things....and I want to tell you something---God knows it....and God's keeping a record of it....and God's going to punish them---you may rest assured of that!" .....Now, when a man would preach like that....this is interesting....isn't it wonderful to know that God's making note of people's sins? Isn't it good to know that God is a God of Justice?.....

Then Amos would talk about these other neighbors of these people--the people who lived round about them--and then he'd take each nation in turn, and his story would be pretty much the same....."Have you heard about them?--they're wicked,

too....they're mighty corrupt".....and then maybe he'd have some inside information and some choice bits, some very precious morsels, he'd share with them, that illustrated their iniquity; and as the congregation waited on the edge of their seats, they were fairly elated to know that God was making note of that, too.....  
...."Preach on, preacher"....."Tell us some more about God visiting the iniquity of these people--God bringing justice from Heaven....."

And then, all of a sudden, Amos would throw them a curved ball--  
--they weren't quite prepared for this....and then he'd say, taking that long gaunt finger of his and shaking it at them....."Now I want to tell you something--not about these neighbors to the north and to the south, but I want to tell you something about yourself.....you are just as wicked as they are!.....You're just as evil....and the same God who's taking note of these other people's sins....He's taking note about your sins too!.....and as God is going to try them in the balance and punish them, God's going to do the very same thing to you!".....and knowing you as I do, you might even be numbered among some of those people who began to edge toward the outer fringe of the crowd and even leave before the last hymn might be sung....."To preach about other people's sins--that's all right, preacher....but don't you dare point your finger at me!...that's the kind of a preacher Amos was.

Now it occurred to me this morning....if by some strange fantasy, Amos would appear at the red doors of Saint Luke Church....he'd say..."If you don't mind, could I have the pulpit this morning?...Oh, don't be alarmed---you think enough of me to read my lesson from the



lectern....if what I said centuries ago is valid enough to be echoed and re-echoed from the reading desk, why not let me edge into the pulpit, too?".....It would be just as consistent, wouldn't it?.... Suppose Amos were standing here right now?....and he would edge into the pulpit, and.....I can picture him now--taking out that well-worn sermon manuscript....and he'd say to us....."Well it occurred to me that what I wrote in a sermon a long time ago is just as true today as then; now I've made a few notations in the margin here--I've brought it up, perhaps, language-wise, to fit this new space age of yours--- but basically, truth is truth...." And so Amos would let us have it. Perfectly consistent, you see---if we think enough of him to read what he said, Why not let him stand up and preach it?

Well, Amos isn't here this morning, but the preacher is constrained to be true to the spirit of Amos....and I'm remembering what he wrote....and I'm about to tell you what I think he would say, were he here right now in person.....

".....There's going to be a famine in the land--now don't be over-disturbed....there's not going to be a blight....it's not going to be a frost--we'll still get the produce from the field to the market.....don't take a mental inventory of your deep-freeze--it's not going to be that kind of a famine and the meat-strikers--that's all by the board, now--the stores will remain open....I'm not talking about this kind of shortage.....I'm talking about something far worse than that---there's going to be a famine of the Word of the Lord----- there's going to be a shortage of the declaration of God's Truth----- you'll be able to go hither and yon and you won't find very many people who know what God's Truth is.....that's the kind of a famine I'm

talking about.".....

This might strike some of us as a surprising thing. For America is the best-fed nation on the face of the earth, I presume--surely the best-dressed--and what other people have a higher standard of living than we? And Amos might also say...."Don't worry about food--you Americans are clever--you'll always be able to have something to eat, even if you take it from sea-weed--you'll always have enough to eat.....I'm not worried aboutt that kind of a famine....but I'm terribly concerned about a famine of the Word of God--there's going to be a shortage of it.....people are going to go on existing on a starvation diet for their souls--and this is a terrible thing.....a famine of the Word of God."

Do you know that we run that risk today? Do not allow yourself a kind of comfort by saying to yourself...."Ah, but there are more names on church rolls now than ever before--bigger and more expansive churches than ever before....." It does not necessarily follow, however, that we are growing and developing a sturdier stock of Christian men and women. That's the alarming thing!

I do not mind telling you.....Every now and then, when we have a staff meeting, or when I have a personal conference with the Director of Christian Education in this parish, I say to Mrs. Orso...."Kathryn, I'm somewhat impressed with the facility that we make available to the people of Saint Luke Church.....These are pleasant and attractive Sunday School class rooms; and we have decent and respectable furniture; and the literature that comes off the presses is nicely done.....and, Kathryn, I think I can tell you that a Sunday or two ago, when I went visiting from department to department, I was somewhat impressed by

our staff--pleasant, congenial, interested, dedicated.....but, Kathryn, I must ask you this---can we be certain that when boys and girls, young people and adults, come to Saint Luke Christian Education program..... that they are getting the pure Word of God?....that, when they come, we are allowing them to be fed and sustained upon God's Precious Truth?... ....As we program--as we plan facilities--let's always ask ourselves that question....lest we allow a famine to exist....lest we allow people to go on subsisting on a starvation diet for their souls...."

Some day I might say to the president of the Women of Saint Luke... ..."May I sit in with your executive committee meeting?"....and I might say to them...."Can we be satisfied--can we be assured--that every time a cluster of women gather together, in the Name of this church--in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ....that somehow, somewhere--in their coming together, we are sharing the Word of God?....lest there be a famine!....."

We have visiting in Saint Luke Church today the young man and his wife--the young man who has been called to be the first full-time Director of Youth Work in Saint Luke Church. He's teaching school in New York state; come mid-summer, he'll establish himself here in this parish. I've already made up my mind that, shortly after he arrives, we're going to have an installation service....and a sermon will be preached, aimed specifically at him--and his soul will be the target of it....in your presence. And in that sermon there will be this charge--the charge that as he comes, he must exercise the solemn and sacred task of seeing that the young people who are precious in our sight and in the sight of the Lord...do not go existing on the frills and all the fancy things of contemporary society---but in the name of

Saint Luke Church, they shall grow as sturdy souls sustained by God's Precious Word.

I do not mind telling you....that time and again, when I come to this sacred desk, and turn my back upon this pulpit---once the sermon has been preached---if there is any sensitivity in me at all, there is the pricking of the conscience...."When you stood there for twenty minutes--did you feed the souls of your people upon the Word of God?".... I know, across the breadth of this land, there are many preachers who, when they go to the pulpit, give nothing but moral essays--beautifully and handsomely done--eloquently, too; I know that sometimes in some pulpits in our land, that when preachers go to the sacred desk, they might be able to give a blue-print for the social order, and speak ever so well about the relatedness to the human order....and this is well....and so it should be.

I also know that sometimes when they go to a pulpit, they conduct a seminar-type of thing; but I am also certain that, under God, important as many things may be from the pulpit, it shall never be said--it should never be said....that when a man goes to the pulpit, he should allow the souls of his people to exist on a starvation diet by not giving them the pure Word of the Lord.

Do you know, that across the United States today, the churches that are growing at the fastest rate are the churches that are exalting the Word of God--preaching the pure, unadulterated Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fundamentalists groups are out-running many of the staid, established churches. What that may mean to you, I do not know, but at least it means one thing to me....that there is a hunger on the part of some people to be fed--by the Word of the Lord---

--that some people thirst for the Water of Life....and the famine should not be allowed to exist.

Some of you know very well that I personally am elated in the fact that I could be related to a parish that has a place set aside for retreat program--where people can withdraw from the world and, for a portion of time, deepen the things of the spirit. I cannot begin to tell you how great the joy is in this one man's heart, when on Friday of this past week, we took our first small group of post-confirmation boys....and in the course of this year, we want to take all of last year's confirmation class in small groups....On Friday, we had a small group of these boys--teen-agers--and for two hours, we did nothing but talk to them about the relationship that they have to the Lord Jesus Christ....pure, unadulterated contact with the things of God.....Last night, inside the red doors, one of those teen-agers, waiting to go down to the square dance, said to me...."Pastor, it was wonderful on Friday..." To use that word 'wonderful'--not about a T.V. idol--not about a rock-and-roll artist--not about someone from Hollywood.....but a teen-ager using the word 'wonderful'--about two hours when he sat with a small group of people and talked about Jesus Christ and his life!.....

The hunger exists--the famine should not be allowed to happen. Amos knew human nature well enough to know that it was going to happen. Centuries after Amos, a carpenter's son from Nazareth stood up and made a profound declaration that we ought never to forget...."Man does not live by ~~the~~ bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." We, in the best-fed, best dressed, highest standard of living on the face of the earth, could run the risk of a famine, should we allow ourselves a starvation diet of the soul. Don't let it happen!

*"Thank God for raising up a breed of men who give of themselves, so selflessly, whose consuming desire is in seeing that the hunger of men's souls is fed. -- Thought in the Season"*

**"THE WORST IGNORANCE"**

The sermons from this pulpit this year, for the most part, are being preached upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. The sermon this morning is entitled, "The Worst Ignorance," and the text is from the Old Testament lesson for this day, a portion of the 7th verse of the 8th chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah:

"but my people know not the judgment of the Lord."

Jeremiah was really God's lonely man. He had had a profound religious experience. God had become very, very real to him; and Jeremiah believed that this thing had happened to him for a holy purpose; that since God had claimed his soul, and since he had come to know God so very well, he could not remain silent--he would have to tell people about it--as many people as he could, wherever he could and as often as he could. The descriptive of the prophet fits him perfectly.....for ever so often the prophet would say..."It's the burden of the Lord"--or, being translated in another way..."Thus says the Lord"...."So God has spoken to me--so God has made Himself known to me, and I have to tell you about it."

Astute and earnest believer in God as he was, with deliberation he would choose his time and his place. If he would get word that there was going to be a special service in the temple tomorrow, Jeremiah would get ready and before perhaps the very first person had come to the temple, Jeremiah would already have arrived; and there he would stand; and as the people gathered, as soon as he had any kind of an audience at all, he'd begin preaching and he'd tell

them about God and the ways of God with men.

If he heard that the king was going to receive distinguished visitors, where do you suppose Jeremiah would be found?--at the entrance to the royal palace; and there he would stand--waiting; and as soon as he could get any kind of an audience, he'd begin to preach--to tell them about God and the ways of God with men. For, he reasoned to himself, who is the king?--should he not also hear of the way of God?

If he knew that something was going to take place in the public square, again, following true to type, before the first person might arrive, would be Jeremiah, soap-box fashion, waiting for the people; and as often as he could, he'd preach--tell people what had happened to him in the name of God--what, it occurred to him, could and should happen to them in the name of God. Well, that's my man, Jeremiah! Wherever he could, as often as he could, in as many ways as he could....trying to impress upon the people the fact of facts--God must be reckoned with.

And every now and then, if he felt his preaching wasn't quite effective, he'd turn to some symbolic gesture....he'd stop by a potter who was taking clay into his hands and fashioning it...Jeremiah would say--so it would seem--"I'm not going to preach to you today....I'm going to let the potter preach....Look what the potter's doing--see how he takes the clay and fashions it. If it's not perfect, he discards it and he begins all over again. God is like a potter....and you and I are like clay...."

Then one day when people were beginning to lose faith and they

thought the world was coming to the end and God would never again visit His people, it was Jeremiah who went and bought a field--a piece of ground--when everybody else was selling, he was buying--to prove his faith in the day after tomorrow, as something that was being held in the hollow of God's hand. That's my man, Jeremiah! In whatever way he could, as often as he could, to as many people as he could....God and man were brought together.

Now, as I read certain portions of his preaching and as I try to detect certain elements in his teaching, I am constrained to admit that he was always dealing with a one-worded question...."Why?" "'Why' do the people of God behave so ungodly?"...."Why, it's incredible," Jeremiah said....."God is forever dealing graciously with us! God has claimed us!....Why, you people, of all the people that God has ever known, He has called you His people, and He's given you patriarchs, prophets, priests, kings.....He's given you the Decalogue-----'why' do you behave the way you do? Why, even a man, when he falls, gets up, looking around, trying to find the direction in which he ought to go....but you don't. Once you've fallen, you pay no attention as to how to get up and where to go."

And then Jeremiah said something that is perfectly classic.

"Do you see the birds in the air? The swallows know when it's time to migrate....they know what God's plan is for their lives..... They know exactly when they should go north and when they should go south and how they should get there; and they seem always to arrive at their destination.....Why is it that a bird is so wise in the ways of God.....and man does not know the way of the Lord?"

Centuries later, that God-possessed servant in Japan, Kagawa,



meditated upon the same truth. Poet that he was, he wrote these lines:

"When I was a child  
Down in the land of Awa,  
I wondered that the swallows,  
Year after year,  
Came back to their same nests again;  
Just as Jeremiah wondered  
At God's guidance of the swallows,  
And wept,  
As he thundered,  
"My people Israel will not return."

- - -

O Brothers,  
Coming back  
Empty handed  
Desolate  
From your sojourn  
Beyond the seven seas  
Look up - behold the birds  
And are ye not much better  
Than are these?"

If a bird which has only a moment in time can live by the ways of God for that bird, why is it that man, to whom God has given eternity, should be so ignorant of the ways and the will of God? So Jeremiah went with that one-worded question----"Why?"...."Why will God's children behave the way they do?...Why are they so ungodly?"

"The Worst Ignorance"--5

As I told you last week, the prophets had dealt with timeless truth. Just as Amos might have edged his way into this pulpit last Sunday morning, so I think Jeremiah is edging his way into this pulpit right now; and his preaching then is what he would say to us now; only he'd bring it up to date by giving us different illustrations, perhaps, in addition to this classic, timeless one of the birds in the air. Jeremiah might say..."Why?"....."Why is it that the worst ignorance continues to remain--that men should not know the ways of God?.....Why is it you--you're so curious....you in America who know so much..".....why is it that we will not be satisfied until we know exactly how to land a man and place his feet upon the moon....and yet we are also a people where a man perhaps might not know the way into his neighbor's heart--who lives next door?.....We, a people who will not be satisfied until we know exactly how to get to the moon, and yet in the very same house where I live, it could be possible for one person not to know the way to another man's heart!.....This is the worst ignorance!.....Why?

Why is it that we in America find it possible, in our endeavor to prove to the world that we are friendly--a good brother--will devise a plan very easily where we will send the President of the United States of America, spending, I think, almost millions of dollars to accomplish it, when you think of all that is involved, security-wise, protection-wise, provision-wise, itinerary-wise----millions of dollars to send a man representing you and me to Asia, to Europe, and now to South America.....to prove to the peoples of the world that we in the United States want to be brothers to everyone else.....and yet we are the same people who do not know how to serve a ten-cent

cup of coffee across the counter where a black man and a white man are side by side.....This is the worst ignorance!

Why is it that a woman perhaps will not be satisfied until she knows the very best possible way to have her hair groomed--to make the most and the best of the features that she has....and yet may spend only an infinitesimal portion of time learning how to rightfully clothe her daughter in the garments of righteousness....this is the worst ignorance---not to know how to bring out the best features of a man's soul!

A returning missionary from India used to tell how he went to visit an old chum of his....their lives had separated--they'd gone different ways, he to the mission field, and this friend of his, from boyhood days, had become a master of the dance, and has established a fine reputation for himself.

And once when he returned from the mission field, he went to the studio to renew the friendship of boyhood days. He was made to wait an hour and one-half outside the studio, because the master teacher of the dance was trying to help a pupil become a perfectionist in one step out of a whole dance routine. Not to sit in judgment, but the missionary friend said --he also knew something of the pupil--and here was a man, so intent on learning one step in a dance routine, he did not learn how to get on his knees or even to fall prostrate before Him who alone is perfect--to humble his soul in the sight of God------this is the worst ignorance.....not to know how to kneel--humble--as a dependent creature....before God!

I have reached the age where I look back now, and try to evaluate the exceedingly wonderful things that have happened in my life-

time; and I am completely astounded!....the miracles that have been wrought in the world of science--in any area of life....to think of what has happened in the past three decades---astounding!.....for there is something that is inately curious about the soul of man--he will not rest until he knows 'how'--to make a better product--to market a better product--or, now, to get into the farthest reaches of outer space.....and the worst ignorance remains.

It may be one thing to plunge to the depth of the sea...it may be another thing to launch out as far as man can go into space and outer space.....while still, as of old, we are grossly ignorant as to how to plumb the depth of the inner man.

God, of course, remains the Great Mystery--no mistake about it. God is the Great Veiled One.....but God said..."It doesn't have to be that way.....I have given you my Word--I've revealed myself to you--I am constantly making overtures to you--I've given you prophets, priests, kings.....".....

.....In the fullness of time, He gave us Jesus Christ, who when He came, said...."I am the way, the truth and the life....you want to know how to get to God--come--follow Me".....and I've been thinking a great deal recently about that particular aspect of it all.....when Jesus came here to earth--that's precisely what He did....He called some people to His side and He said, "I want you to be with me"....and He had a name for them.....He said, "I'm going to call you disciples." Now a disciple, from the root meaning of the word, is a 'learner'--a follower. Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, by the integrity of His own life wants to banish this

ignorance...."I'll show you the face of God....I'll show you the heart of God....I'll show you the way to Heaven---if it costs me my life!"

Centuries before Jesus Christ, God's lonely man, Jeremiah, looked out over the city--he looked up and he saw the birds....ah, they knew God's way....but the children of man--they suffered from the worst ignorance. And Jeremiah wept.

The years passed. God's Great Gaillean, the lonely carpenter's son--He, too, went and watched over a city by night....and He, too, wept and shed His tears--because the children of man did not know the way. He cried all the more because it was all so terribly inexcusable. They did not have to remain in their ignorance--the way had been shown.

I plead with you, my friend--we who are so born curious..... feed your soul on divine curiosity. Say to yourself again and again-- --"What is the will of the Lord?....What should be God's way among men?" "He who wills to know--will know"---the Scriptures guarantee that.

I don't know of anything more desolate, more frustrating, than to want to get somewhere and to not know how to get there. Jesus said, "I want you to know." Yours, my friend, need not be the worst ignorance.

John 3:16--GOD

Today, and the remaining Sundays in Lent, we shall return again and again to the text which serves as the basis for this morning's sermon. It is John 3:16, often referred to as "Everyman's text". By the way, do you have a favorite passage of Scripture, If one were to take your Bible into his hand and to treat it as graciously as you treat it, would he be able to discover that there's one page perhaps worn more so than any other page--perchance you've pencilled it and put a ring around it--maybe you've even written, 'my favorite passage.' There are some passages of Scripture that mean more to us than other passages. They have a way of speaking to our condition. In the service book that I use here every Sunday when I come and stand within the shadow of this altar, someone has written for me a passage of Scripture designed to sustain my soul as I act as your shepherd and bishop of your souls.

Martin Luther....at the very mention of his name and the thought of the Bible, there are those who say..."Ah, yes--Martin Luther had a favorite passage, didn't he?--or at least we'll associate it with his name: "The just shall live by faith"---this is Martin Luther's favorite text."

Or when you turn to the selections of the Psalter--Psalm 46 is known perhaps by every Lutheran as 'Luther's Psalm'---"God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble"---the basis, of course, of the great hymn that he wrote, "Ein Feste Burg."

When people read about David Livingstone and if they know anything at all about the man, instinctively they associate this verse of Scripture...."Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"....for it was this passage of Scripture that David Livingstone read ever so often as in darkest Africa his heart and soul were renewed by some word of Jesus Christ.

You have found with a great deal of profit, haven't you, the new series added to SAINT LUKE MESSENGER this year--"My Favorite Bible Passage." It's been good discipline to assign certain people of this congregation the privilege and the <sup>ob</sup>ligation to reflect upon what could be called their favorite passage of Scripture. I do not know for certain, but they tell me that ~~during~~ Dr. Raymond Sorrick, the beloved pastor of this church at the time of its erection, was called upon to choose a passage of Scripture that could be carved into stone above the entrance to Saint Luke Church. They tell me that was a favorite passage of his--you can read the words for yourself--they're still there.

Whatever may be your favorite passage, the text which will serve as a basis for these Sunday morning sermons is in reality every man's text. For this text, John 3:16, has universal appeal:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

If by some strange circumstance it should come to you that you should forget every other passage in the Bible, you should count yourself most fortunate if until your very last you could repeat these words. Someone has rightly referred to it as the 'Little Gospel.' Everything for which the proclamation of Christian truth stands is condensed in these words. All that we really ought to know about God---the fact that He is....the fact that He has done something exceedingly wonderful in giving His Son....the fact that He gave His Son for you and for me.... and the way by which this wondrous grace can be appropriated by my soul----these truths are spelled out--in this wonderful passage ~~that/He/gave~~..."For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

This morning's sermon is introductory. We will begin where we ought to begin--by concentrating on the one word that ought always be part of the Christian's

vocabulary--and the one word at which he ought always to begin his thinking---  
GOD. May I ask you right now, how often do you think about God, and when you do  
think about God, are they your thoughts? Or could you be dealing constantly with  
second-hand thoughts about God?...thoughts that you had about God that you had  
because somebody else gave them to you? I'm not arguing the point that they might  
not be true....but there is a certain validity about an experience which each man  
must have for himself and that most particularly is true when it comes to think-  
ing about God.

There are those who tell us that God is the one word that keeps forever  
slipping into our vocabulary--and it's the one word about which people all too  
often have nothing but a hazy concept as to its real meaning. GOD.

When we go to our summer place, ever so often on a summer's night we'll  
go out on the bank and stretch ourselves out against the ground...look up into  
the starry heavens---the only light that's perceptible at all is the light that  
comes from a million stars.....ever so far away. It is a most salutary exper-  
ience....to lie there and to look out into the great beyond....and to allow your-  
self the healthy discipline of raising questions.....

.....Is He really out there?

.....Is there honestly now, the Master Mind?

.....Is this the act of creation? .....and is that Creator  
my God?

.....Does He know that I am here ....of all the people who have  
ever lived---of all the people who have yet to live---does  
He who guides these stars in their course know I--that I  
exist?

This is a salutary experience.

The difference between great preachers, they tell me, is the difference  
that's found in the fact that there are some men who have a first-hand relationship



with God....and others deal only with Him in a second-hand relationship. That could be true of you as well--the relationship that is born out of a personal confrontation with the fact of God.

When a visitor goes to London and he is at all church-minded, he may want to worship in one of four places. He may want to go to Westminster Abbey, where kings and queens have been crowned and where Britain has buried some of her illustrious dead; he might want to go to St. Paul Cathedral, that architectural gem of Sir Christopher Wren---that one building that remained as a great influence upon the lives of many, many Britishers when, night after night, when the blitz came, as long as, amid all the fire and confusion, they could look up and see the Cross amid dawn, the Britisher would say to himself...."As long as the Cathedral stands, we can stand, too,"....and miraculously, the Cathedral remained; or there are those who, when they worship, may want to go to City Temple in London, the church made famous in these recent years by Leslie Weatherhead--and they may also remember that once upon a time, a distinguished American preacher, Joseph Port Newton, was called to be the preacher of that church.

Then there's another church they might want to visit--the church that has the romantic-sounding name...St. Martin-in-the-Field, in Trafalgar Square; and they tell me that even to this day, when people worship in St. Martin-in-the-Field, they catch something of the spirit of God in the distinguished rector of that church of several years ago, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy--dynamic soul--a 'veritable fire-brand for God;' chaplain in World War I, chaplain to His Majesty the King of England; they tell me that you could never be in the presence of Studdert-Kennedy without being made aware of the fact that God and he had met; or to put it in the words of William James, the philosopher...."God and the human soul had business with each other;" for Studdert-Kennedy reflected that; and he remains to some of us as a striking example of a man who knew God first-hand; for God...he'd always begin at that point...and he knew something about God.

In one of his writings, he has shared with us this first-hand confrontation with God--it could be a reflection of your own spirit. Let me read his words for you:

"I was alone at night on a moor by the sea. Above me a dark velvet dome and a million stars. Beneath me moving slowly in a heavy swell, the sea. No sound but the rustling of a breeze through the heather, and the boom of the waves against the cliff. I was alone, that is, I was acutely, painfully conscious of myself as a reality, and at the same time even more acutely conscious of that vast, shadowy, mysterious other-than myself, looming up out of the darkness over against me - the universe - - - Suppose I cried out to the great other-than-myself: "Who goes there?" Would there be any answer? Or would there be nothing but the whisper of the wind in the heather, the boom of the swell on the cliff, and the desolate cry of that lonely gull returning late to its nest?"

Has this been your experience?...to be conscious of the reality of yourself as over against the reality of the universe, and then to wonder whether or not there is someone out there, if you could know Him, and if He pays any attention to you at all? There is a basic hunger on the part of men, this sanctified curiosity....is there? I told you Kennedy is the great man because he had this first-hand experience. Listen to his reply:

"Well, I made my cry and I got my answer. I have often doubted it..." (don't let that shock you)... "and never entirely understood it, but it remains. If I lost it, I think I would lose my soul. I have been trying to say it ever since. At the time, the answer was only one word, "GOD." "

Studdert-Kennedy takes his place with one of two groups of all the people on the face of the earth--there are really only two groups .....those who look out and raise the question and get the answer that there is someone there and that you can know Him and that He knows you and He wants to make Himself known to you.....this is the

group of the idealists--the spiritually-minded; on the other hand, there are those who cry out and they get no answer....and because they get no answer, they become materialists, and they say the only thing that matters is matter.

How fortunate you and I are. We've gotten a reply to our cry, and we call Him GOD....and because we've come to know Jesus Christ, we've discovered that this God who is there wants to make Himself known to us. We can't discover Him--He discovers us! He makes Himself known. And because we are Christian, we read lines of love upon His face, we can feel the gentle pressure of His hand upon our shoulder, we can feel the strong tug of His arm around us, even as He rescues us from the brink of hell. How fortunate we are, we who whisper...."God."

But alas for man, this is not always true. George Buttrick is perfectly right in his book on prayer when he allows us to believe that 'prayer', like 'God', become the forgotten words of our vocabulary. We talk so often about our world....we talk so often about our efforts....we talk so much about what we will be doing---and we fail to recognize the fact of God! Again and again man struts proudly down the way of the universe and talks about what he is going to do when he lands his feet upon the moon. This is man's world--so we think--so we behave.

Man has become so presumptuous that I was shocked the other day to discover the title of a book, "God in the Space Age," and one of the chapters entitled is this: "Who Owns The Moon?"----so presumptuous is man....allowing himself to believe that the first man to get there can claim ownership! This may have certain prac-

tical overtones, but one must never forget that once upon a time there was a breed of people on the face of the earth who when they thought of such things, said...."The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein...."

God needs to remain a definite part of our vocabulary---he needs to remain a definite part of our thinking. You know what a painter does, don't you, when he paints a landscape. Where does he first begin?.....He begins with the sky--and all the other tints and hues and shades that become a part of the canvas get their hint from the sky. This is a parable for man. The world makes no sense whatsoever without God.

This sermon is introductory to the series. We've tried to begin at the only point where we ought to begin.....God. It's always significant for me when I come to conduct a service in the Lutheran Church--it seems to be a parable for all of life--for the very first words that you hear spoken by the officiating minister..."In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost..."---we're hearing God's name.....and the very last words that you hear on the part of the officiating minister in a service of worship in a Lutheran church, the benediction ends..."in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost...." In God's name we go out. We belong to God. And nothing can ever cut asunder the love that exists on the part of God for you and for me.

I am reminded of the words of Charles Darwin. As he faced the remaining years of his life, he observed that he found it increasingly difficult to appreciate poetry and music. This was not always true for him. When he was quite young, he listened daily to the work of some great composer and read poetry frequently. Then he became too busy for this sort of thing, only to discover that when he sought to resume it he had lost his proper taste. Even so, my friend, there could be for us such a thing as an atrophy of the soul. As we become too engrossed in the things of life, we may give less and less thought to God. Should the time come when we wish to pay Him more attention, we may find that our souls have withered in the meantime.

JOHN 3:16--LOVE

Each Sunday morning during Lent we shall return to the same text. In reality it is Everyman's Text--the text with the universal appeal--John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The introductory sermon to this series, delivered last Sunday morning, dealt, of course, with the first and most important word in the text--the word, GOD. It follows quite naturally, as night follows day and as day follows night, that the second word in this series should be the word--LOVE; for the two words are really synonymous--you cannot think of love without God--you cannot think of God without love. The Scripture itself puts it so magnificently, so perfectly--"God is love."

Now I'd better warn you, that perhaps a more appropriate title for this sermon would be, "God's Kind of Love." Don't you dare bog down at any point in the next eighteen or twenty minutes by getting the word confused with the kind of love that's oftentimes practiced by human beings, which is far from being God's kind of love. The word in your vocabulary and mine, perchance, that suffers more from misuse and abuse is the word 'love.' There are, unfortunately, many, many kinds of love. But for our purpose this morning, it's God's kind of love.

Look at Henry Van Dyke, who said:

"And love, I often dream of that,  
The treasure of the earth;  
How little they who use the coin  
Have realized its worth;  
'Twill pay all debts, enrich all hearts,  
'Twill make all joys secure;  
But love, to do its perfect work,  
Must be sincere and pure."

God's kind of love is sincere and pure.

Do you remember what was said last Sunday morning?--when we sought to establish the fact that down deep in the soul of every man--thinking man--there is a desire to know if there is Someone "out there" who takes note of insignificant man. It was that picture that I shared with you, lying on the ground, back against the ground, staring up and out into space by night, looking into a million stars, and wondering if there is Someone out there....who takes note of me....or if there is the Master-Mind--the Creator who ordered all the world into its proper being.....fortunately, as Christians, we say there is; and doubly fortunate are we as Christian--we believe most earnestly that He who made the world and holds it in the hollow of His hand has a heart, and a heart big enough for each one of us.

We who take the name of Christian say, "Why, there is Someone, and that Someone, of all things, loves us." Down deep, also, in the heart of every man there is a hunger and a craving to know that God loves him--that this God whom we adore and revere and respect is a God that has a hand that not only makes the world, but a hand that with gentle pressure comes to touch my shoulder.

My neighbor speaks beautifully a parable of life when she tells about her daughter having been put to bed at night, somewhat disturbed by the darkness and the loneliness, cries out in the night; and the mother coming to the room hurriedly, seeking to reassure her and to comfort her, devoutly says, "But do not be afraid...God is watching over you." But she says, "Mommy, I'd like someone to tuck me in, to

kiss me goodnight and to put your arms around me." This is a parable of man....in his loneliness and in the dark night of his soul, he hungers and craves for a God with arms--who can hold him--and as He safely embraces him, whispers words of reassurance.

There are some men who worship pure beauty--pure truth--pure justice. Who is it tells about the Parisian who went into the Louvre and saw there the Venus de Milo, and was completely awe-struck by such perfection. Beggar chap that he was, hungry and ill-clad, did he not receive a vision, hearing the voice of pure beauty say..."But I wish I could help you, but I have no arms.".....

Men need a God with arms; men need a God with a heart...and the need is perfectly right and proper because that's the way God made us. God made us in His image....in His likeness we were made to yearn, to crave for what He is. And there must always be two parties to love--the lover and the loved. God, who is love, is loving us. We, who are the recipients of His great love, whether we call it by name or not, are characterized by the hunger to be loved. That's why this sermon follows so easily and so naturally last Sunday's sermon. You talk about God....and you have to talk about love.

There are about four things that we ought to remember now. The first one is this: it is the very nature of the God whom we know in Jesus Christ, to love. Alongside of this passage of Scripture that every one of us should memorize...."God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life"....remains these other three words--"God is love." Do I have to remind you that this is a distinctly Christian concept of God? It should remain fresh in your mind, the



Old Testament lesson for the day....even Moses, ahead of his time, exemplifies the hunger of a man to see the face of God. Even in the Old Testament you get this concept of God as a God of justice--perhaps as a God who is beneficent and kindly and watches over a whole people... but He is also a God who has to deal with a people until they reach the place where they can understand the beauty and the glory of His face-- up until that time he continues to be, in their minds at least, a God whose face cannot be seen.

It isn't until you come into the New Testament that you discover a God who stoops--a God who empties Himself....the theological word for it is 'incarnation'--your free translation of it can easily be, "God who comes in the form of a man"....God who comes so close to me that I can even read the lines of love upon His face....a God who comes, walks and lives....a God who suffers....a God who proves His love to me, even to the end that He will die upon a cross! This is the New Testament understanding of God....God becoming transparent--and it is love that makes Him transparent. It is the nature of the Christian God to love.

Point #2: it is the true nature of love to give. You cannot separate the hand from the heart. You cannot separate the word from the deed....."God so loved the world that he gave....." The Scripture does not simply say, "God loves"....period. God so loved that he gave. It is the nature of love to become articulate. It is the nature of love to become active. It is the nature of love to become something that moves and does. I am wondering, sometimes, when you read your Bible, if you will not discover as I have discovered, that some of the

most significant words in the Bible are the verbs....God, who is acting, loving, giving. It is the nature of Christian love, once it gives, to give itself. Mind you, we're talking now about God's kind of love. Love is never really love until the soul of the lover is clearly evidenced.

In the impressionable years of an adolescent, I used to spend my summers during high school vacation periods and the first several years of college, going with my father, who was a salesman. I discovered several things....how people in this fair land of America could take an immigrant into their hearts--in any number of homes, he was never a stranger--one generation after another seemed to accept him as part of their family....and then I remember observing him when, perhaps, the head of the household was about to buy a gift for somebody else--and they would be talking about a certain thing that my father would have; and my father, knowing the family so well, could well afford to speak up, freely and frankly....and occasionally--I can hear him say it even now...."You really don't want to buy this, do you?....This really doesn't represent you!"

Mark you, this is not the master stroke of a master salesman! This is the evidence of a man who knew human nature--who had gained some understanding of the fact that whenever a thing is given, it becomes a tell-tale mark of character. We are known by what we give and the manner by which we give it. You cannot divorce the gift from the giver. "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son...." God so loved the world that He gave....Himself. In every evidence of God's love, you see God. We're talking now about God's

kind of love.

This, too, must be said this morning: it is the nature of God to love....it is the nature of God's love to give....it is the nature of God, when He loves, to give Himself....it is the nature of Christian love, that when it loves, it does not become exclusive..... "God so loved.....the world"....all of us. How strange is this from your kind of love and mine! We are so selective--never so selective as when it comes to loving. There are folks for whom it is very easy for us to become gracious--they are attractive--they are the down-right lovable...and likeable. This is your kind of love--my kind of love. God's kind of love isn't like that. God's kind of love takes in the whole world.

This was brought home to me in a very vivid way when I remember New York City. I recall the school that I attended one summer session. It was a comparatively easy thing for me to be kind and gracious and considerate of the band of students with whom I was to associate for the summer session. We had so much in common; and we learned to get along with each other rather easily. But then I recall the days when I would separate myself from that group and I'd see New York City--the flotsam and the jetsam that is New York--to see shuffling along the streets in Manhattan....even as I remember now certain sections of the Bowery--those who had dissipated their lives--whose every step it seems, taken with so great effort, was a blasphemy against life!

I don't know of anything in this world as unattractive as the ugliness of a sinner, bent on hell. Shall I tell you....I skirted them as best I could--waiting until I could get away from them--hoping and praying that I wouldn't have to look a single one of them straight in the eye, lest in begging for a dime, I would have to pre-

tend what I really wasn't at the moment. Yet, a few hours after that, there wouldn't be almost anything in the world that I wouldn't have done for a few other people. They were attractive--they were decent--respectable....."God so loved the world....."....and the world, for the most part, continues to be peopled with down-right ugly folk, whose hearts are black and mean and bitter. But when God decided to love, He said, "I'll love them." God be praised that it's true, for if it were not true, for the life of me, I don't know how some of us would ever have come into the picture at all. If God would have been as exclusive in His love as you and I are exclusive, we would not be numbering ourselves as we now do--in the ranks of the redeemed.

From heaven above, God looks down upon the earth. He must be saying to Himself, "Well, one day I went down there and I showed them-- I was so close to them that they could not help but see the lines of love upon my face....and one dark and bitter night I even rent my heart asunder--tore it wide open....that every single one could see that the heart of God was filled with nothing but love...."

This same God looks down from heaven upon us. And what joy He must know in His heart, when every now and then He sees a follower of Christ---of whom it can be said...."By this men know that you're my disciple, because you have love toward one another"....and God in heaven--would you dare me now to give you this picture--paces back and forth, looking down ever so eagerly....wondering how long it will take until His idea of love catches on.

JOHN 3:16--WHOSOEVER

"UNWILLING JOURNEY" is the title of a book which was written by a Lutheran pastor from Germany who is held captive for five years and went from prison camp to prison camp inside Siberia. It really constitutes his diary and he has recorded for us, in a very fine fashion, very deeply sensitive, the kind of thing that he experienced during those long and difficult years. One one page he tells us about the comfort and consolation that came to him as he read the pages of his Bible. Oh, yes, he had to read it in clandestine fashion. It was not always smiled upon. He knew very well that if he should lose it, he might not be able to get another. So, secretly, he would hide it, night after night.

He tells us how, on one occasion, he dug a hole in the ground, underneath a tree, and, so he thought, safely tucked his Bible away. The next day, when he had a moment in which he could read, he went looking for his Bible. Uncovering the spot, he discovers that it's gone. Miraculously, it is found again. Whoever had taken it put it back somewhere where he could find it within the brief course of a day or two. But suppose the Bible would have been gone forever! What, then, would he have done? He would have been dependent, of course, upon whatever pages he had memorized. He would have been dependent upon whatever verses he could recite, as he recalled them from the fabric of his mind.

Suppose something like that should happen to you and to me! Oddly enough, suppose that all the Bibles that you and I possess would be destroyed or confiscated....what, then would we do? Martin Luther says it is the Bible which is the Cradle of Christ. We, ourselves, say, very tenderly, "It is like a lamp unto my feet....this is my guide....all that I know about Jesus Christ, I have come to know from the Scriptures that reveal it to me, and then other revelation sets in on top of that." ..... Suppose the Bible should be taken away from you! Could you rely upon the Bible in your heart? Could you go on quoting one passage of

Scripture after another, from memory?

There are those who practice the very fine discipline of each day taking a verse of Scripture and committing it to memory. May I recommend it to you, even as I recommend it to myself. And if you want to begin with a verse, why not begin with the verse of verses, John 3:16, which someone has said is "the Bible in miniature"....this is the Gospel of God:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Here, you are introduced to the fact of God--what God is....who the object of God's love is....and who can appropriate this love of God, and to what end. It is the Gospel of God in one verse. It's the whole story of the Bible, condensed into one sentence.

I need not remind you, that by recalling some verse of Scripture, you can hold your soul in good stead, on more than one occasion. You haven't forgotten, have you, that when Jesus had to do business with the devil, he set the devil to marching, because again and again, he could say...."It is written....this is what the Word of the Lord says..." Who knows how often you may have done with temptation, if in your moment of weakness you can be sustained by the precious Word of God!

Well, Sunday by Sunday now, during Lent, we've been coming back to this one verse in particular--enough to bring measures of comfort and consolation to our souls, at any time. The first Sunday, we dealt with that word...GOD. Properly, we began with it. Then, last Sunday, we dealt with the word....LOVE....that followed as the night follows the day--you can't talk about God without talking about love--you can't talk about love without talking about God....God is love. That's even the way Scripture puts it.

Now, this morning, the third word....WHOSOEVER....and this, too naturally follows....for, since God is love, who can appropriate this great blessing to his soul? To whom is it made available? God loved the whole world....but does the whole

world collectively assume it? The whole world is the object of God's love, but it is appropriated individually....."whosoever"--may have it. There's an old Gospel hymn, which I do not know--I only remember a certain part of it--it goes, something....."whosoever, whosoever--that means me!" This is the point at which we ought to begin as we think about this text today. The "whosoever" to whom this Scripture refers is you!...I!....me! Think of it! God loves me! The love of God is shed abroad throughout all the world, but, moment by moment, we make it particular, and we allow it to focus directly and perfectly upon your soul and mine. I am the "whosoever." I am a single soul, among many, who can appropriate this wondrous grace, and take advantage of God's love. God loves the whole world, but the whole world is made up of people, and the whole world must know that love only as individuals appropriate it.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted in a very interesting manner. He was said, by many, to be the 'voice of God' to countless numbers of people. He was a veritable "firebrand"--the personification of "the sword of the Spirit". Let me tell you how his conversion took place. He could not account for it, but one Sunday morning he felt driven to church. It was a snowy Sunday morning--a stormy Sunday morning.....and when he did get to church, of all things, he was the only one in the congregation....and the preacher for that day wasn't the regular preacher for the day--he was a layman who had accepted it as an assignment from the priest of the parish, to conduct the Church of England service. The lay reader had prepared the sermon--well, why not go through with it?--after all, he had made the preparation, and even though there was only one person to hear it, he'd give him everything he had. And that's exactly what happened!

Spurgeon recalls that the sermon didn't have too much to it....and he wasn't much of a preacher, this layman--in fact, he stumbled over many words....but he said he had one thought, and he kept hammering it away--hammering away at it...."Jesus

Christ saves sinners, and you're a sinner, and Jesus Christ saves you!"....all the time he kept pounding away at that one thought, he kept pointing his finger at the one person in the congregation, as though the one person might miss the fact that he happened to be the only person....."Jesus Christ loves you! .....Jesus Christ died for you! YOU!" Under the influence of that dynamic thought, focused on one soul, Spurgeon gave his life in response to a love as great as that....and his conversion took place.

We come here together, one among many people....and you are the fourth congregation to assemble here today. Don't allow yourself to be dealt with, by God, collectively, even though that fact is true....but see yourself as one person among many, and know full well that there are certain moments when the light of God's love is particularized--it shines on you. You and I are the "whosoever".

'I would be a wonderful thing if we could stop at that point...Religion, as far as I'm concerned, is something that takes place vertically, just between God and me...For me to say each day...."God, you love me!....Thank you, God"....and let the matter rest on that score. Vertical as this arrangement is, and should be, this thought could never stop there, and this sermon can't end there; for if I am a "whosoever", then my brother is a "whosoever" also....and every other single person on the face of the earth can say to God exactly what I say and claim from God exactly what I am able to claim. The love of God is not exclusive. The love of God is shed abroad throughout all the world, and he embraces every single one of us. God, in Christ, came into the world to save every single one! Me? Yes. My brother?.... every single other person that I meet? YES.

Now, this is the thing sometimes we forget. We are so vain, that we can say to ourselves...."Well, I know why God would love me--but this chap?....How could God love him?" ..... "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever...." ..... and that "whosoever" can be this person as well as this person.



I've always been in debt to a page that I read about certain Mohammedan people....they tell me that in the Mohammedan world, sometimes it's whispered about--that no single scrap of paper should ever be discarded or wasted, because, on it, the name of Allah--the name of God--can be written. The parable remains....no single soul, no matter how unattractive or unlikely, or, if you wish, unlovable--in your eyes--should ever be allowed to go to waste...ignored....discarded.....for this is a soul that can also receive the imprimatur of God--which is the love of God in Jesus Christ.

"Whosoever"....that means me--it means this one, too. And sometimes these other people would never know that they can qualify as a "whosoever", unless they learn it through me,...or through you....or unless they catch something of the love of God through us. I shudder when I think sometimes how many people there are who could have learned about Jesus Christ....if they could have caught the contagion of my love and my allegiance for Him. There are many other "whosoevers" who may never know about His love, and may not wish to appropriate it and claim it for themselves, except as they catch it through somebody else.

They tell me, that once upon a time, a certain town that had received a blight, economically speaking, had a group of clergymen who were quite concerned about the estate of the souls of the people....heavy-hearted....beaten in spirit......."Can't we do something to bolster their courage?" And some clever man among them said, "Well, why don't we have a parade?....and we'll go down the main street....and we'll have people carrying sandwich-boards, and then on these boards, we'll imprint verses of Scripture....if, when a man reads them--he will take heart!--God loves him-- --he need not be discouraged." A peculiar thing happened. They didn't get very many people who were willing to volunteer to put themselves on parade that way.....so they got some of the town's derelicts--you've seen them--typical sandwich-board men--.....

....and they walked down the streets of the village....."God loves you"...."God is love"...."Take heart, the Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting wings, the everlasting arms"..... One man looked at the parade, and he said, "I felt as though I could almost believe the words, but then my eye fell upon the men who carried the signs...and there was no ray of hope in their eyes...there was no spring in their step."

Suppose that could be true for you and me! Suppose that could be true of you and me, when other people see us on the highway of life--fellow pilgrims in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.....would they be encouraged to believe and accept the love of God, by what they see in you, and by what they see in me? "Whosoever"--that means me....."whosoever" means somebody else, too....unattractive, ugly, unlikely, unlovable.....

When God gave His love, He said, "I want everybody to have a chance at it.... ..I want everyone to be able to claim it." Do you know what you and I do sometimes? We run our course....and we select certain people that we think can qualify....we make bold to do something that God Himself has never done. In God's book, that word "whosoever" means anyone can qualify.

I want to share with you, now, a fable. It's a thing of fancy--I warn you, now, it's not in the Bible--and, I'll whisper, it's not exactly orthodox, either--but the truth inherent in it may demand the respect of your soul. The fable has it, that St. Peter was making his rounds in Heaven....and he enjoyed the satisfaction of recognizing the people that he, himself, had seen come through the main gate....but, every now and then, he met someone that he did not recognize....and St. Peter wonders how they got there.....for the moment, he's inclined to think they don't look nearly as respectable as some of these other people that he very definitely recalls seeing enter....(this is a fable, mark you)....and, as he makes his rounds in Heaven, being somewhat troubled by these people~~x~~ that he does not recognize, he suddenly comes upon

the form of a man, leaning out over the wall of Heaven, and, at the risk of his life, extending a hand and helping people up....the leak into Heaven.....and he takes this man to task, and as he grabs him by the shoulder, he is confronted by the face of Jesus Christ.....and before Jesus Christ has a chance to say anything, the people who are being helped in, in this way, say, "Other people thought we hadn't a chance.....but Jesus did!"....."Whosoever".

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".....wondrous thought--that "whosoever" is me.....equally wondrous thought--that "whosoever" is that chap, too.

JOHN 3:16--BELIEVETH

This is the next to the last in the series of sermons based upon John 3:16. Sunday by Sunday during this Lent, we've come back again to this most wonderful of all verses in the Bible:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

On the first Sunday we dealt with the word, GOD, beginning, of course, quite properly; and then on the second Sunday we concentrated upon the word, LOVE, because it follows that way, just as naturally as night follows day. You cannot think of God without thinking about love, for God is love....and you cannot think about love--in its purest and finest form--without thinking about God. Then on the third Sunday, which was last Sunday, we dealt with the word, WHOSOEVER. This wonderful thing--God is love--is made available to "whosoever"....if you want to put it that way. And you may remember that again and again last Sunday, it was established that "whosoever" means you and me.

Now, on this fourth Sunday, it's the word, BELIEVETH. God's love wonderfully great, is limitless; but, alas and alack, it does not follow that everyone appropriates to the full, the fullness of God's love. This is the pathetic thing that must be said....God's love remains constant and it's full and it's free, and His love is shed abroad throughout the entire world, but not every person appropriates for himself this love of God and allows to be guaranteed to him the very great objective of God's love, which is to guarantee every man....everlasting life.

God's love, limitless, is conditioned, and you and I are the conditioning factor. Either we have faith to accept it, or we do not. Now at first blush, this may seem difficult to understand. Yet, let me call a page from the Bible to remembrance. When Our Lord was here on earth, He had twelve disciples, and He loved every single one of them. He loved Andrew, Matthew, Bartholomew, Simon Peter, John, James, Judas, Jude. He loved Judas as much as He loved Simon Peter, and when He loved Judas, He did not love him one bit less than the way He loved Matthew.

God's love....through Christ....full, constant, free; but even the Bible bears witness to the fact that of the disciple band numbering twelve, every now and then there were three who seemed to be a bit closer--Peter, James and John--not that He loved them more than He loved the other nine, but perhaps they had a way of appropriating, in a different way, what He was freely offering all of them. And mark you, of all things, even out of that inner circle--Peter, James and John--the Scriptures refer to John as they do not refer to the others. Even on that last night when He spent with them the intimacy in the upper room, there was one pictured nearer than all the rest, leaning upon the shoulder of Our Blessed Lord---so much so that a Gospel writer could say..."He was the one whom Jesus loved". But that's the Gospel writer's way of evaluating it....it does not mean--never dare you allow yourself to think it--that God loved John more than He loved Judas, Peter or Andrew.

I cannot explain it to you, but there are some people who have a way of appropriating more of God's love than other people. The difference is not in God....."God so loved the world, that he gave his

only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"....God's love--constant, full and free, is beaming out toward every single one of us--and beaming out toward an objective....that once you and I respond, we should be saved to everlasting life....but the conditioning factor--you must believe--you must have faith---you must personally appropriate this!

"Ah!", but you say to yourself...."that shouldn't be difficult--why, don't you know, it's been proven--it's an established fact--that everyone believes....everyone believes something....somewhere....somehow!" There was a time when people doubted that this was true. And yet, as the world came to be explored--as people began to get around and to visit even primitive folk--in the great forests of Africa--in the mountains of Malaya--in the deserts of Australia----the report is ever the same....everywhere, people have been found to believe--something--somewhere--somehow. They may believe in a god or gods....they may spell it with a capital 'G' or a small 'g'....man, given the capacity to respond toward the eternal, does that very thing.

But this isn't the important thing--it isn't important that man should be a believer....it isn't important that man should believe in something--somehow.....the tremendously significant thing is that he should believe in Jesus Christ and the God who is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ....the important thing is that he should come to call by name....the God who made him....the God who loves him. You have to read every bit of Scripture, my friend, and even the prepositions are important...."For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in HIM"....he's the one who has the assurance of blessing--the one who believed in HIM.....

and this God has a Name

.....and this God has a face

....and this God has a heart

....and this God has a hand

....and this God has a great objective.....

.....He is not vain....He is not, as someone has referred to Him as "The Great Blare".....Martin Marty, in his book, "The New Shape of American Religion," is perfectly right when he takes us to task for being a people, today, who have made religion, a religion in general.. ...and who have faith, but have faith in general. This is not the religion of the Christian. The religion of the Christian is one whose faith is anchored in a God that he can call by Name, and that God is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's an interesting thing, sometime, to see how we appear to other people--how other people look upon this very popular thing called religion--in this day--in America. Let me share with you something from this newspaper clipping that comes from abroad....it bears the title, given rather cleverly by this columnist--"Good Old Somebody--The Cult of a Nice, Safe God." One of the more curious manifestations of the religious impulse in North America these days is the worship of that wonderful, wonderful god....'Somebody.' OH, they have other names for him--but he is best known as 'Somebody', probably because of the popularity of that song, "Somebody Up There Likes Me". 'Somebody' is indeed a valuable and versatile deity.....He is conspicuously active in the world of sports. After pitching a famous perfect baseball game in the World Series a few years ago, Don Larson said that during the game, he constantly prayed, "Please help me, Somebody"....and Somebody

responded, rather nicely. Marlene Stewart Strite, Canada's sweetheart of golf, admitted to a reporter, after she had won the ladies' golf championship of the United States of America, that 'Somebody' had been pretty good to her! Do you remember what Floyd Patterson said, after he knocked out Archie Moore, to win the heavyweight boxing championship at that time?...He told the world that "God had been in his corner".....This is the curse upon American religion today---that we make God a buddy-buddy---that we become chummy with God...and refer to Him so easily as 'Somebody up there who likes me'.....Nobody up there likes you! He who is there, loves you--and there's all the difference in the world between liking and loving---just because there's all the difference in the world between 'Somebody' and the God who is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.....Should I go on?....it also includes that blasphemous statement of Jane Russell...."When you get to know God, He's a livin' doll!" Blasphemy, I say.....a God like that does not save! God is far from being a 'living doll'.....He is the God who is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ came into the world, and when you see Him as He is, His side is bleeding...and there are nail prints in His hands.....and there's a crown of thorns upon His head..you can't get chummy with a God like that.....you stand in fear of a God like that because.....you and I are the ones who made Him that way!.....a 'livin' doll' can't save!.....a 'Somebody' can't guarantee eternal life!....."God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in HIM!....in Jesus Christ!

And you say...."All right--I've been reading, too....and just as you've been preparing for this sermon, I've been doing some reading and thinking also.....if you want to paint clearly this God in whom I am



to believe, how shall I really know Him as He is?....what is the God in whom you want me to believe, then?".....and then you will say to me, if you want to...."I have been reading, Pastor, and I read something about the Greek philosopher who, a long time ago, said, 'If a dog could make his god in his image, his god would be a great dog; and if a horse would want someone to worship, he'd fashion for himself a perfect horse!'".....and, you religionists, you're not one whit different....you fashion a god in whom you want to believe, too...you make a god in your own image....you call him father, and you know why?....a father stands for someone who guides you and directs you--rebukes you--if you're naughty, he punishes you.....so you say, God's like that....and you call him 'Father'...you're making Him in the image of someone that you know.....and if you're good, and you behave the way you should, your father smiles sweetly and rewards you.....

All right, you make God that way, too....you say He's a great father who smiles and rewards.....Ah! This may take you so far, and only so far because, in all of this, you're making God in your image...and the God who saves us is not the God who's made in our image!...God made man in His image--man does not make God in his image--and there's a difference--all the difference in the world; so therefore, if I am to believe in God as He is, you say--I who have been blessed with the capacity to believe, how can I make sure that I'm believing in the best possible god?

And the Christian has the answer.....God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. There came into the world--Jesus Christ--and He is the only one who has ever been able to say..."No one comes unto the Father but by Me".....He is the only one who has

been able to say..."He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father...the Father and I are one." This is the advantage that you'll have, then, my friend--as one who has come into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ ---you have come to know God as He is. That's why the Apostle Paul could say, without hesitation..."I know whom I believe, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I commit unto Him, against that day."

It begins to make sense, doesn't it?...God is love--but you can't fall in love with love. Love means something to you when you find someone becomes the personification of love....and then you begin to believe in love as you never believed in it before; and God is truth, but can you honestly respect truth in the abstract?...it is given to us, fortunate mortals that we are, some day to come face to face with someone who is the personification of truth, and because we have at one time or another seen someone who would rather die than tell a lie, we respect truth.....and God came to earth....God stooped to man.....and God lived here--came to our level--and He said, "This is what I'm like!"....."For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him....."

I do not know how it may be with you, but this I will tell you....that there are many things about this hour that we spend together--whether you should be here with me when I am here at 8:00 o'clock, 8:30, 9:30 or 11:00--there are many things that I ask God to keep giving to me afresh....and throughout the course of a single hour, the one moment that almost makes me stand on tip-toe, is when we come to recite the words of the Apostles Creed....."I believe"... It isn't what I fully know....it isn't what I fully understand...but

this I do believe.....that God loves me....God came down from Heaven to die for me.....God, in the form of Jesus Christ, is my Saviour.....and I can call Him by Name!

It would seem to me....I cannot speak for anyone who does not take the Name of Christ....but it would seem to me, that when my last hour may come---the only thing that may hold me in good stead is to be able to say---"I believe.....in Jesus Christ!"

*And it seems sometimes as though our very lives are blasphemous -- we make light of the deepest and most precious experiences -- and we use His Name so easily -- are we not to blame that our generation doesn't even know the meaning of the word 'awe'?*

*God help us -- in a congregation as blessed as ours in Laket Lake Church -- blessed with a wealth of numbers -- with a wealth of material possessions -- with a wealth of intelligence -- with a wealth of youth -- if we do not fulfill our mission and make clear to all, by confession and commitment, what our belief is --*

*— Thoughts on the Sermon —*

"John 3:16--Everlasting Life"

For five Sundays now I've been coming to this sacred desk and each time I have been asking you to think with me about the same passage of Scripture, properly referred to as the most wonderful passage in the entire Bible. If some strange thing should happen to you and you should forget every other verse in the Bible, this is one verse that you ought never to forget--John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"

This is the Gospel in miniature.

I do not know how it has been with you--each man must speak for himself--but this I will tell you....for myself, in two decades of preaching, never have I found a verse of Scripture that has so stimulated me....never have I preached a series of sermons....never have I looked forward to going to the pulpit, Sunday by Sunday, with a greater measure of enthusiasm on my own part---than what has been true for me these five Sundays that we've spent together with John 3:16. And I think I know the reason why. This is the full Gospel of Jesus Christ. All that you need to know about God, you find in this verse. The fact that He is....and then you learn about His nature....and then you learn He came to this earth in Jesus Christ.....and all of this is the perfect expression of His deep and abiding love.....and then in this verse, you discover that this love of His is made available to any man who is willing to believe....and then,

in the end, we are taught that the objective here--all of this has happened--in order that you and I should be guaranteed everlasting life. This is the Gospel in miniature. Happy indeed would that person be who might find it the rule of his life, spiritually speaking, to repeat these verses every single day that he lives: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This morning, it's the last word in the text...EVERLASTING LIFE. Some thirteen hundred years ago, when the first representative of the Christian religion came to the British Isles, he was received, so we are told, by the king of the Northumbrians. He received him in almost royal splendor, for he~~d~~ was given to understand that this missionary represented the King of Kings. They made much of the occasion; and the king allowed the ambassador of the King of Kings to speak; and then he cut him short, and he said...."Don't go on one bit farther..we are not interested in hearing anything else that you may have to say, except this one thing--can your new religion tell us anything new about life after death? What does your Jesus Christ have to say about life after death? We know a great deal about this present world"... ..that's what the king of the Northumbrians might have said..."We know how a man eats....we know how he sleeps....we know how he drinks...we know how he orders one day after another.....but when it's all over ---then what?"

Men have been raising that question since the dawn of time. Is there a life after death? and if so, what is it like? I wish I could tell you. I cannot tell you what happens as soon as a man breathes his last. I cannot tell you what happens when a man comes to the end of

his earthly pilgrimage--the very nature of all that occurs beyond the grave. That I cannot tell you. But this I can--that death comes to each one of us; and that some day Jesus Christ as King of life, writes finis to the end of the book that you and I have had in our hand as long as we've been here--this I can tell you--that some day the earthly pilgrimage will come to an end.

And this I can also tell you--that what happens after we breathe our last could be, in kind and degree, much that we've already known here and now. Now that should startle you, my friend. There is nothing magical in the hand of God, but when a man dies, he becomes automatically good and pure. I can readily understand, although I could never subscribe to it, why the Roman Catholic Church should allow her people to believe in the doctrine of Purgatory--that even when a man breathes his last, that there should be such a thing as a necessity for the purging of his soul, in preparation for eternal bliss. While I could never subscribe to it and while I would never want to teach it, I could understand why someone would think of such a doctrine.

It is not given to any of us to believe or to understand, that as soon as a man dies and he goes to heaven, that automatically he is changed from evil into sinlessness, for the simple reason that this process has been taking place before he dies. Life eternal is not something that happens to us when we end our pilgrimage....life eternal is something that is in constant process. Everlasting life is not something that begins when you and your breathing....life everlasting is something that is taking place right now within your heart and within your soul.

It makes sense, doesn't it? If it's life everlasting, it's already begun. If it's life eternal, it has no ending nor beginning--it's in process right now. And if I understand the purpose of Jesus Christ, this is why He came to earth, among other reasons....that we should know Him, the only true God, and to know Him would be to enjoy life eternal....now! Oh, sanctification sets in, and we become constantly purified and improved as we abide in the favor of God and in His grace, but the beginning--you and I are now part of it!

It becomes a very healthy thing, my friend, for each of us to recognize that when Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth, He did not come simply that here on earth we should learn how to live a better life just here and now. Jesus Christ did not come that you and I, right here and now, should become more decent and honorable. Jesus Christ did not come to this earth in order to raise for us the standard of living....my friend, Jesus Christ came to earth to raise for us the standard for dying!.....so that as we live out our days and as we live out our years, we should so live daily that we inherit life eternal.

I do not know what your abiding concern may be in life, but this I have been told, that for some people, the abiding concern is the present moment---bread for my table tomorrow morning....and a guarantee of some kind of social security and comfort when I can no longer be gainfully employed....I want all the comfort and conveniences of this present world. That, whether you care to accept it or not, is an unfortunate indictment of your generation and mine. There has never been a generation of Americans more conscious of social security, economic security and all the benefits for living today, each twenty-four

hours, than is true for your generation and mine. But Jesus Christ did not come into the world to teach us how to appreciate all these so-called benefits for daily existence. Jesus Christ did not over-much concern Himself with each twenty-four hours of eating, sleeping and drinking.

Paul Tillich, in a fascinating book which is a series of little sermons which he delivered at one time or another, says in one of his little sermons that the word that Jesus Christ spoke to Martha should be recognized as a tremendous passage of the Bible. Do you remember when He was being entertained by Mary and Martha...and Martha was kept so busy in the kitchen, worrying about whether or not the table would be spread....worrying about whether or not she would have enough food from the cupboard to put on the table...worrying about whether or not she would get help with the dishes....and all the time Mary was in there talking with Jesus Christ---in profound contemplation about the things of the spirit....and Martha complains to Jesus Christ....and Jesus Christ cuts her short....He says, "Martha, you worry about many things--Mary is concerned with the better part."

It is important that a man should worry about whether there's bread for breakfast or not....a man should concern himself as to whether or not he'll have enough laid by so that he will not have to live at the mercy of other people in his old age....but it's a question of how much concern to give to these things. There are some things that never deserve ultimate concern, and a piece of bread for breakfast might be one of these things; and whether or not you might be able to maintain a standard of living to provide for two cars instead of one



may not be one of these things that should call for abiding concern on your part and mine. Jesus Christ said, "I have come to give you life--not for the next twenty-four hours--not for three score years and ten....but I have come to give you life abundantly, which is life eternal."

So much of your energy, my friend, and so much of my energy, is concerned primarily with the next twenty-four hours and, as the next twenty-four hours may be related to the next twenty-four hours, only as far as this present world is concerned. But when we do that, we project ourselves against tomorrow and we're interested only in tomorrow as we see ourselves in that tomorrow. This, beloved, is not life everlasting. To see, not myself, in the present moment, nor tomorrow---but to see God in the present moment, and to see God in the moment as far as tomorrow is concerned--this is life everlasting---to see God!

I did not understand it at the time, but when I saw the official motion pictures presented as the evidence of the war-time trials at Nuremberg, I could not understand how these things could have been done by a people against fellow human beings. Now, upon reflection, I can see. They were concerned with a human being only as he had any value for the present moment. When he had nothing to contribute to their scheme of things, in the new world that they wanted to build here on earth, they had done with him.

What is everlasting life, except to see God in the meaning of the present moment? When a man sees God in the meaning of the present moment, he is already living in the presence of God. In recent weeks, a good portion of my time, on occasion, has been concerned with the

Chapel of the Grateful Heart. It has been a spiritually rewarding experience. The man who designed the Chapel of the Grateful Heart is over eighty-one years of age. The last day he was here, he told me that at one time in his life he wanted to become a preacher, but, for one reason or another, the Lord never fully claimed him for the pulpit; and then he gave himself to fashioning pulpits where other men could stand and where other men could preach. He told me, ever so eloquently, "I have made it my business in life to make wood speak." You cannot stand in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart without feeling, instinctively, the presence of God. You cannot come to this nave without gazing upon this altar and feeling the presence of the Lord. He also designed this chancel and this altar, a number of years ago. "I have made it my business," he said, "to make wood speak--to see something of God in every piece of wood with which I deal." This is eloquent, my friend---this is the story of a man entering into eternal life....to see God in everything with which he has to deal--this is life everlasting for you and me....to see something of God in every fleeting moment, when we give ourselves to such contemplation....to see God in the present moment.

It's interesting when a man reaches a certain age, he looks back over his years and he begins to number the people who have left an outstanding influence upon his life. Some of the men who have marked my life for good have been the men in the pew. There was Jay McCoy--rough and rugged a man as ever I got to know, and yet one of God's noblemen. He had been converted in one of the Billy Sunday campaigns, and I used to say that Jay had his own private back door into the very presence of the Lord--that's the kind of a man that he was.

I stood with Jay one day on a cold winter's morn, with all the sadness that comes from a cemetery hill. His twenty-one year old son, the baby of the family, had run his earthly course. He had had a heart condition from the day he was born; but Richard, his son, was one of those men who is the personification of gratitude and truth and beauty; and when that casket was lowered into the ground, I hope to my dying day I shall remember what Jay McCoy said--I have since forgotten any word that was said at the burial service itself---as that casket was lowered into the ground, Jay McCoy turned to me and he said, "but you can't say 'there he goes'"......

No grave can mark the end of the earthly existence...ah! it may mark the end of the earthly existence, but no grave can write 'finish' over the word of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't go down there and stop. This is life everlasting--to claim God in the present moment. When I claim Him in the present moment, I shall never be a stranger to God.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish"...fritter and waste away his life....but he should enjoy life eternal.

"PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS"

The text is the closing verse of the Gospel lesson for the day:

"And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

The noise, the din, the clamor, the confusion did not die easily. Come the end of the day, people were almost as excited as they were in midday; and little groups, no doubt, had gathered here and there to discuss among themselves all that had happened. It was nearing the time for the Passover. It wasn't at all unusual to have some kind of excitement, but within the memory of these people, they could not quite recall a day exactly like this one.

He was a carpenter's son, an itinerant preacher who had become a marked man--who with defiance had entered the royal city. The crowds had come out to greet Him; and as He entered meekly, they shouted---the type of thing that they would give to a victorious ruler or one in whom they would pin their hopes....they who had been prisoners of hope for several generations....."Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

Would you permit yourself the luxury of a sanctified imagination now, even as I would allow such a thing to myself. Suppose we try and find ourselves, now, in the presence of a small group of people who now were talking about the event of the day...trying to figure out what it all meant. Let us go and visit a man--for our purpose

## "PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS" (2)

now, let us call him Joshua Ben-Israel....eighty years of age, perhaps, a man who had seen a number of things in his lifetime and a man unusually gifted with wondrous insight into events and into the lives of people.

"And, Joshua Ben-Israel, you were there today---what do you make of it? What shall we think of this man from Nazareth? What shall we think of this acclaim on the part of the people?"

He did not answer easily....nor did he answer quickly. With the wisdom and the daring that becomes a man of years, he seemed to be weighing every word that he would speak. Then, after a while, he said,

"I can still hear it, and I can still see him. I am not much concerned with what they said, but I am tremendously impressed with the bearing of the man. I saw something today that I have never seen before. I saw courage. This man--this carpenter's son--this itinerant preacher....I tell you, he was the personification of courage.

"He came from Nazareth. Do not forget too easily....don't you remember what happened in Nazareth about two decades ago?...rather, not in Nazareth, but not far from Nazareth....there was that village of Sepphoris....twenty years ago it happened. That means he must have been about thirteen years of age. The Roman government came to Sepphoris and put down, by force, a rebellion. Out of Sepphoris, typical of the upstarts from Galilee, there had been sown the seeds of rebellion--Rome called them tyrannical--and they said, 'We will make an end of this'....and the Roman government took two thousand men from Sepphoris and crucified a thousand of them on either side of the road--

"PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS" (3)

'thus shall it be to tyrants--thus shall it be to any people who speak out against the existing order.'"

Joshua Ben-Israel said, "I remember. How could anyone forget? This happened not far away from Nazareth, and he must have been only thirteen years of age--in the impressionable years of his life. It must have registered very definitely.

"Knowing all of this, mark you!...he came to Jerusalem...riding victoriously, allowing people to acclaim him as a victor...flaunting this very thing in the face of Rome. We have heard that his preaching allows red blood to flow freely within the veins of men, and some day would throw off the yoke of the oppressor.

"I tell you," Joshua Ben-Israel said, "I saw courage today, in this man of Nazareth--a marked man....yet he comes out openly...'Here I am!.'"

No one dared say anything else for a while. Is this all, now, that Joshua Ben-Israel would say to us as he tried to interpret for us the meaning of Palm Sunday?

Then he began to speak again...."I saw challenge. I saw today a carpenter's son defy the world....I saw a carpenter's son who would be king, lay down his challenge to the people....coming out openly...'Here I am--will you accept me or will you reject me?....Make up your mind!....Here I am.'"

Joshua Ben-Israel said, "I've never seen the like of it before! ...that a man should come into the capital city and challenge people to take him seriously....that a man who had nothing but words by which to march into the hearts of men and women, would say, 'Here am I--come now, make up your mind.'"

"PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS" (4)

" I saw a man, today, thrust before people, one last great challenge. For three years he had been preaching, going here, going there--in this little village--in that village.....now he comes to the big city--the Royal City.....you, too, shall be confronted--for the moment, I have no other word--'challenged' men...'Make up your mind.'"

And this time he did not wait as long to speak his third word, as he paused between his first and the second....."And I'll tell you something else," he said. "To see courage is one thing....to see challenge is another.....but to see pure, unmitigated, unadulterated compassion--and to call it by name!.....that's something else! This, too, is what I saw today---compassion. He calls himself a king, but where is his kingdom?.....He calls himself a king, but where is his army? I looked upon his face, and I saw nothing except the lines of compassion. He's going to establish his kingdom in the hearts of men!....He's going to enthrone love! Not hate. Not bitterness. I've never seen this before, either....'I have come to establish my kingdom', said he.....

"And now that I think about it....now that I've read about him-- --through what people have said--" (because that was the only way people could read)...."Now that I know these things about him---this is compassion!

"Why, even now," he said, "Now that darkness has come over our city,"....this is the peculiar quality of insight that Joshua Ben-Israel then had....he said, "Even now I would be willing to say that, no matter where he may be, if he is overlooking our city, he is saying, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and those

that were sent to thee--how often would I have gathered thee unto me'. Even now, I would say, wherever he may be, he is not basking in the sunlight of a victorious entry---he is crying his heart out--over the likes of you<sup>r</sup> and me.

"I looked into his eye, and I saw love---love, I dare say, and now I am willing to be a prophet--which men will attempt to destroy, but they will not. I even say for him--they will kill him, but he will love them just the same."

And here again I would say, if this peculiar insight given to Joshua Ben-Israel could be expressed again, he would say...."Even though they kill him, I think I can hear him say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

I walked away from the tent of Joshua Ben-Israel, and as I walked away, I went in silence. Joshua Ben-Israel said, "Here is courage, here is challenge, here is compassion..." And then I said to myself, "That challenge---it comes to me as well!"....and then I transported myself immediately as the Pastor of Saint Luke Church, and I found myself in this pulpit this morning; and I said..." I am not Joshua Ben-Israel---I am the Pastor of this church....and suppose my people came to me and they said, 'What does it mean?..this Palm Sunday that happened then and there--what does it mean to me?'...I would say to them, 'It means, He is the courageous one....it means, He is the one who gives you the challenge....He is waiting...will you shout 'Hosanna', or will you cry 'Crucify'?"

Before I would put my pencil down, finishing what would be the



"PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS" (6)

manuscript for this sermon, I had to write, "and they had no other choice." The King who makes the overture toward your heart, provides us with no other choice. We shout, "Hosanna" and follow Him forever...or we find ourselves in the company of people who say, "Crucify"--and we do not speak out against it.

"O God, how can I choose but love Thee,  
God's dear Son;  
O Jesus, loveliest and most loving One;  
Were there no heaven to gain,  
No hell to flee,  
But what Thou art alone,  
I must love Thee."

"AS A SHEPHERD"

The sermon is entitled, "As A Shepherd". The text, from the Old Testament lesson for the day, the 34th chapter of the prophecy of Ezekiel:

"For thus says the Lord God; Behold, I, even  
I will both search my sheep and find them.  
As a shepherd seeks out his flock, so I will  
seek my sheep."

Men have often raised the question, and rightly so, "What is God like?" Now this is the more important question. Sometimes they're inclined to think that the important question is, "Is there a God?"--- but that's not nearly as important as what this God is like that exists. For, if a man should answer for himself, "Yes, there is a God-- out there, there is Someone"....this is not enough. "What is that Someone like?"----this is the important thing with which the mind of man must deal. God wants us to know what He is like. And the only way we can know what God is like is when God sees fit to reveal Himself.

Now, let it be said at once....getting to know what God is like may not be, at first blush, as easy as you may think. For some of us find it extremely difficult to know what we ourselves are like. For me to know my own true nature--Ah! It is not easy! I may change from day to day---I may even vary with the changing hours in the course of a single day. And I have lived long enough to know that within this earthly temple there's a crowd--there's one of me that's humble, and there's one of me that's proud. Sometimes I'm never quite sure just which one is I. When we are very frank with ourselves, this we will admit, that we're never quite sure of our own selves. It is not always

easy for a man to know what he himself is like. Nor is it easy for me to know what people are like with whom I associate. They, too, may vary from day to day and from condition to condition and from circumstance to circumstance. Maybe he speaks the language of all of us when he says, "I've been married to her for fifteen years, and I still can't say that I really know what she is like." Men who have been either supervisors, foremen, or men who work under supervisors and foremen have said, "I've been there for more than a decade now, and I'm never quite sure what he's going to be like from one day to the next--I really don't know him!" Now, this is true. We have a way of changing from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance.

Now, if you will have to admit that we humans can't quite know, sometimes, just what we are like, and it may not be easy for us to appreciate the true nature and the true character of somebody else, why, then, are you inclined to think, my friend, that you can know what God is like? For God is infinite and we are finite---we are human and God is divine. We are so glued to the things of this present world and God is free and eternity.

May I make bold to say that I can tell you just what God is like?....that the question dare not be ignored. The question is basic and the question is important because men have a way of becoming like the gods they worship. Tell me the things you revere--tell me the things you respect, the things you hold in veneration.....and I can tell you something of the character that you will become. Some wit--I think that he speaks ever so wisely--has said that one of the lamentable things about this generation--yours and mine--is this: that there are so few things, any more, that we revere...we hold sacred---and, alas

### "As A Shepherd" (3)

and slack, we become like the things that we reverence. The question is important.....what is God like?

It's the purpose of the Bible, you know, to answer that question--one of the purposes of the Bible, at least. And the Bible begins, not with the question, "Is there a God?".....you're repeating for yourself already, aren't you, the opening verse of the Bible?..."In the beginning, God....." It does not question the fact as to whether or not there should be a God; but then, once that statement is made, from the first cover to the last, the Bible is the record of the nature and character of God....what God is like and how God will deal with His children---how God will deal with His world.

What is God like? Can I know? God says to me...."No, you can't find out for yourself." You and I, on our own, can never know what God is like. That's why it's the Holy Spirit. You read again Luther's interpretation, his explanation, of the third article of the Creed, and you'll be given to understand in no uncertain manner, that it's the Holy Spirit that leads and guides and directs us. God says, "You can't find out for yourself--I will have to tell you.....you can't find out for yourself--I will have to reveal Myself to you".....and for some of us, as we study the mind and the purpose of God, we discover that God is dealing graciously with us. In one disclosure after another, He is the Great God who reveals Himself...."This is what I am like.... ..I want you to know, because you can never really love Me until you know what I am like....you can never really serve, until you know what My will is....I want you to know.".....And from the very beginning, the Bible is the record of the disclosure of God.

For a while, you see, according to our experience, He is the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob---He is the God of the patriarchs, the judges, the priests, the prophets, the kings; and then God, if I may put it to you this way, has to go off and shake His head, and He says, "This is not enough--they don't seem to understand." And then God had some agents that were not good and clear pictures of Himself. So one day, when you read the Bible you come to this great prophet, Ezekiel, who says, "God is like a shepherd. God says, 'I will go to them, and if they are lost, I will find them and I will show them what I am like....I have a shepherd's heart'".

Do you want to know what God is like? You should know what God is like. God says, "I am going to tell you"....and among the unforgettable pictures of God that come in clear and sharp focus, is this one with the most rewarding satisfaction....He is like a shepherd.

And then one day, turning the pages of time, you find there was a Man, a carpenter's son, who stood up and said, as He looked at yonder Judean hills...."I am the Good Shepherd. You want to know what God is like?--look at Me. Others have given you verbal pictures--I will live it out, and if necessary, I will lay down My life to prove it....I am the Good Shepherd." And, aside from the words of pardon that might come from His lips, I can't think, for the moment, of anything that could mean quite this much to me, as to hear Jesus Christ say, "I am the Good Shepherd."

Centuries before Jesus Christ, you get the voice of Ezekiel. Centuries before Jesus Christ, there is a shepherd lad, watching his sheep by the silence that comes with the silvery stars from a Syrian sky; and as that shepherd has a concern for his sheep, he knows that

there is only one person in the whole wide world to whom those sheep really belong, and because they belong to him, he has an unending responsibility, and he is ever mindful of the fact of possession. He brings them home....he is able to put them in the fold for the night, and he stands and he counts them...one, two, three.....ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine.....the one hundredth is not there. He makes the ninety-and-nine secure and safe, and, at the risk of his own life, out into the darkness he goes and, as the Scriptures puts it, even the word of Jesus Christ for it, he will go seeking it, looking for it, until he finds it. He does not go looking for it until he becomes weary....He does not go looking for it, until "he has exhausted all apparent possibilities".....He does not go looking for it, until ~~until~~ and then rationalizes it and says, "Well, it's only one....I do have ninety-nine, and maybe that one is not of much consequence." The word of Jesus Christ for it....the shepherd goes looking for it....until he finds it--and if necessary, he will lay down his life for the rest of them,....'None of the ransomed ever knew how dark was the night that our Lord passed through, until He found the sheep that was lost.'.....This is what God is like...."I am to you as a shepherd." David says, meditating upon these things, "Why, that's exactly the way God is to me---as I am a shepherd to these sheep, so God to me a shepherd is!"

A good shepherd is mindful of these things: the fact that the sheep belong to him, and they tell me, in all the world of literature, there isn't anything, perhaps, quite as precious as the tender portrayal of a shepherd and a sheep, dealing affectionately with each other...The sheep, sensing the fact that they belong to this one.

"As A Shepherd" (6)

Men who have gone to Palestine sometimes have tried to don the shepherd's garb and to take the role of the shepherd, but the sheep will not follow him because they know the one to whom they belong. This should be a source of much comfort to us in this day and age---we who want security! God says, "Know this kind of security--you belong to Me!"...and I wonder sometimes if down deep in the souls of the minds of each of us, if that isn't the thing<sup>s</sup> we want most--to belong to someone--to belong to some thing.

Adolph Hitler, they tell me, could do what he did because he was able to capture the minds and the spirits and to possess them, as no one else in his day was able to do. It wasn't simply an idea--it was the fact that here was a man who was able to sell the idea and to gain a loyalty....no wonder they called him Fuehrer!

There are those who tell me that Communism can grip the minds of people as nothing else may grip them, because it has a way of making them important and of possessing them....this desire to belong to someone and to some thing. And I think I can understand what he meant when he said--the writer who was trying to talk about the various shades of human conduct--as he lays down the thesis that there are some who give themselves shamefully, if only they can have the satisfaction of knowing that they belong to someone, if only--for a brief, fleeting moment in time.

God says, "You belong to me! I am your Shepherd!" What a wondrous thing this could be for you and for me, if, when we look upon all men, regardless of their color, regardless of their race--if we could look upon every single human being that we see, and say of them as we say of ourselves, "As I belong to God, so he belongs to God." We

could re-write, almost overnight, the whole story of man's inhumanity to man.

I also read, some time ago, about a man who was haunted by the fact that the woman that he had wronged, was a child of God. Having, pursuing the lust in his own soul with this woman, he was haunted in a dream by the very voice of God, that said, "But her soul...her soul belongs to Me! God is like a shepherd. God possesses us. And because God possesses us, He will provide for our needs. That's why, as long as God allows us a fresh memory, we will recite, ever so affectionately, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want"...and once we see ourselves as the sheep in God's pasture, the two thoughts have to go together---because He is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Don't you dare be too smugly intellectual that you can't appreciate what I am going to tell you now. The story is told of a boy who grew up in a family among many families during depression days, and his mother, a widow long before there were widows' benefits and mothers' benefits, could not make ends meet. This child finds himself in the circumstances of having to face the next day as a barefoot youngster... ..oh, of course, you can add, it's the cold and the dread of winter... this thing has happened.....and what does he do that night when he goes to bed? With all the child-like faith that is virtue in itself, he says, "Dear God, won't you see that I get a pair of shoes?" How do you suppose the mother felt? But, oddly enough, that night a neighbor came, bringing a pair of shoes that his youngster had outgrown.... She took them and put them by his bed, and when he got awake in the morning, gleefully he comes running....."Look, Mommy!---God heard my prayer!---here's a pair of shoes, and there's no hole in the ceiling!"

Be sure and add that, my friend....'there's no hole in the ceil-



ing'...for this shepherding love of God is dependent upon the cooperation of human beings. There are many needs in people's lives that are going to be satisfied, in the Name of God, through you and through me. There are many of God's sheep who are straying, who are going to be restored and found, as the seeking and the longing of God is manifested through you and through me. And I must add this, my friend....how many straying sheep are on your prayer list?....how many folk are there for whom the heart of God continues to burn?--for whom, perhaps, you may toss restlessly at night, in your sleep?

You want to know what God is like? He is like a shepherd, who owns his sheep. Regardless of the reason for straying, He goes looking for them until they are found. This is why I warm my own soul with certain words that I have formed by way of comfort, and this I most certainly believe.....since God is the Good Shepherd, nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond of love that God has for you and for me!

### THE CHRISTIAN HOME

The second Sunday in May is being increasingly observed as the Festival of the Christian Home--that this day should also serve as the proper introduction to the second week in May, which serves as Christian Family Week. Therefore, I come to this pulpit this morning to have you share a thought or two with me, upon the basis of the Christian home.

Rita Snowden, in a very delightful series of articles, known as "Quiet Times," tells a very pleasant thing about Sir Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. He had been invited to a certain home where he had been only twice previously; and as he went for his third visit, he took with him a guest; and just about as they turned onto the street where the people lived, Sir Arthur confided that he had quite forgotten the exact number of the house---he wasn't at all sure where they lived. His friend suggested that perhaps they would go back to Sir Arthur's home and maybe somewhere on his desk he had made a notation of the number. But Sir Arthur was not at all inclined to do that; and, with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "Well, come along--we'll find it--I'll guarantee you that."

This is what happened....when they got to that section of the street where Sir Arthur felt his host lived, he began going up the stairs and then, standing at the door of the place that he hoped was the home of his host, he refrained from knocking, but rather he went to the boot-scraper and kicked it. Now, for whatever percentage of this congregation that is here this morning that knows nothing at all about a boot-scraper, perhaps I'd better explain....it is a relic of a day gone by. A generation and more ago, people could imbed, perhaps on the stoop of their house, on the pavement, the porch that served as an entrance, a heavy piece of metal, iron, undoubtedly, that was elevated, and there the guest would come and scrape from his boots or his shoes, the mud that had accumulated as he

had walked to visit his friend. And there aren't very many of them around any more...in all the visiting that I've done in Saint Luke Church homes, I can think of only one home that I've visited where there's been a boot-scraper. But, be that as it may.....a relic of a day gone by, but in Sir Arthur's time it was quite common.....

And after he tried about four-five boot-scrappers, triumphantly, he said, "This is the place!" And his friend said, "How can you tell?" He said, "Didn't you hear it?....when I kicked against that boot-scraper, there was a note that was struck---E flat! I remember when I had been here before, when I struck my foot against it." As long as Sir Arthur remembered that home, he remembered this note that was characteristic of it.

A perfect springing-board for the preacher, isn't it? Now is the time to moralize...now is the time to philosophize. What is the note that is characteristic of your home and of ours? When people remember a previous visit, is there a note that is characteristic of the visit that they had in your home and in ours? Whether you care to admit it or not, this remains true, my friend--that our homes are characterized by certain notes that are struck.

There are some homes in which we visit....once we are there, we say it is characterized by a note of discontent. It permeated every conversation that we had with our friend. No matter where we looked--no matter what we experienced, discontent was the word that best described that home.

On the other hand, of course, we've visited any number of homes where, when we think of them, we think of them gladly....peace and joy and contentment reigh supremely. Every member of the household seemed to reflect it--every conversation that we enjoyed breathed a peace and joy and contentment....this was the note that was typical of that home.

When people visit your home, my friend, what is the characteristic note that

they remember about your home? We who claim the name of Christ ought to so conduct our households and our homes that when people come, they should say that the spirit of Christ is characteristic of our homes. And how will they know? There are tell-tale characteristics....the Bible in evidence....a religious painting--a picture of our Blessed Lord--perhaps, in the dining room, one of the Last Supper....or maybe, if you're fortunate enough to have handed down to you from other generations, those religious mottoes--"Christ is the unseen guest, the silent visitor, ever present".....these could be tell-tale characteristics that Christ is in your home....but they're not reliable. There is only one certain way by which your home can be characterized as Christian, and that is when the spirit of Jesus Christ prevails. Only Jesus Christ can make a home Christian. Can people tell it, when they visit in your home? Is the spirit of Jesus Christ there?

Two men were riding on a bus....a third overheard their conversation. One of the two men had in his possession the morning paper. He was reading about the death of a very prominent man in the community--both of them had known him; and as the one read the article about the passing of this man, he came to the notation that said, "Funeral services will be conducted from the Methodist church"....and the one mused, "Smith--a Methodist!---Who would ever have known!" For shame! For shame, that someone should have embraced the Christian faith, and people should not know!

You and I, who claim the name of Christ---our homes should be Christian, but how will people know? Should one have to raise the question, "Who would have ever known that theirs was a Christian home?" How can you tell whether a home is Christian? The answer is a simple

one--whether or not the spirit of Jesus Christ prevails...permeates the conversation....whether or not the face of Jesus Christ is made radiant upon the faces of those who live there.

I do not know how much thinking you have given to this, but this I would submit: that sometimes it could be established that the greatest ally that God has may not be the Christian church; it could be that the greatest ally that God has is the home---and the Christian church simply supplements and builds upon what the home offers the Christian church. Now, if the home is to be God's great ally, then it can serve its primary purpose in the plan of God only as it becomes Christian. And it could be that the face of tomorrow's world is going to be fashioned---not so much by what is proclaimed from the pulpits of the Christian church---not so much by the prayers that are made before a sacred altar, within cloistered beauty....but by the type of conversation that takes place in the living room of your home, and by the kind of praying that is done by you, the father and the mother, as the priest of your household, when you tuck your child into bed.

Now, because the home is this important, I am reminded of what <sup>Harvard</sup> Alfred Luccock once said, that he had read in 1955--a very interesting advertisement that appeared in a very prominent news magazine. A scientific firm was trying to prove to the American people that much of the money that was spending in research would make a profound impact upon tomorrow's world, and their advertisement was a salute to their laboratories...and the advertisement had this very intriguing caption, "Little Rooms That Will Change The Face of the World;" and the reference, of course, was to this laboratory and to that laboratory, where the scientist was going, with profound respect and devotion, to his study---that he might be able to offer something that would change the face of tomorrow's world.

Long before 1955, the case could have been readily established of little rooms that were changing the face of the world. And, who knows, behind every great wave of the future, has been the ripple that's been formed by what has been happening in the little rooms of the world. Why, my friend, it was even something less than a little room....where God saw fit to come down and closet Himself securely into the arms of Mary.....

it was something less than a room....to which the wise men of the world came and bowed their head in reverence and adoration.....

it was a very little room....in which Jesus Christ went to sleep, night after night---that house in Nazareth was not very big.....

it was a little room in which our Blessed Lord met with His disciples and observed the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.....

it was a little room.....in which the disciples gathered for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.....

.....little rooms which shape and fashion the wave of the future.

And I'm thinking right now, of the little rooms in certain homes ....a nursery is always a little room, usually built to accommodate one child at a time; and what happens in that little room--in the nursery--shapes and fashions the wave of the future. At the end of the 8:30 service this morning, I'd gone to the office here, and I looked from the window as parents were bringing their children to the Sunday School rooms; and I saw one grandfather, looking with adoration, and I dare say, with prayer, upon his grandchild. Think what is going to happen in tomorrow's world, when this child, rising to its full measure of strength and character, by the length and shadow of a dedicated soul, permeating even the soul of that child with the spirit of Jesus Christ!

When God places into our life and into our love the soul of a child, as long as we live, we have no greater responsibility. And if tonight it should be your good fortune to go into a nursery room and to tuck a child into bed, remember this, my friend....that the prayer that's made by a devout parent, in that moment and in that place, is ever as precious in the sight of God as the most eloquent prayer made by a saint before a holy altar.

Someone has made a study--he has called it, "The Threshold Line"---that in this day and age, when a man crosses the threshold of his own home, he should find an entirely different kind of world--of peace and quiet and contentment, that will sustain him when he goes back to the world that is always bringing its pressures against him; that as soon as he comes home and crosses the threshold of his own home, he should come to a kind of haven; and the note that is characteristic of his home determines the kind of contribution that he is going to make effectively to the society on the other side of that threshold line.

Now, alas and alack, I tell you it's not only the father who comes home--to the other side of that threshold line....it's also almost every member of the household, now, who goes out into the world; and even children come back from a world that makes its impact upon them all too soon, dragging behind them all the influences that could make them neurotic or psychopathic; and if once they cross the threshold line into what they call their own home, and they can find something of the spirit of Jesus Christ there, then they can make an adequate contribution to the world on the other side of the threshold line.

Now, there are two things that must be said yet. What is it that makes a home Christian? The answer is--the spirit of Jesus Christ.

....only Jesus Christ can make a home Christian. Now, there's a pronounced parallel between the life of the individual Christian and the home. Point #1: Just as an individual becomes Christian because he decides to become Christian, so the Christian home becomes Christian because somebody has made the decision to make it Christian. You never automatically become a follower of Jesus Christ. You become a follower of Jesus Christ because, somewhere along the line, you've been confronted by Jesus, and you have made up your mind to follow Him.... ..even so in the Christian home--it never becomes automatically Christian.

And the second thing that must be said is this: That once the decision is made to have your home become Christian, you must everlastingly keep after it--you must properly plan that it remain Christian. That shouldn't be too difficult. Most of us are always planning this thing or that thing about our home....always trying to figure out whether we can afford this or we can afford that....always looking ahead as to whether this is the year that we do the recreation room or we don't do the recreation room....whether this is the year we include the porch enclosure or we don't include it....and when the automobile salesman comes with the latest model, we begin to figure as to whether or not we can write it into the budget or whether we can't write it into the budget.....this should not be a strange thing to us, this matter of figuring and contemplating as to whether or not this thing is going to become part of our life. If we're willing to do that for the latest convenience and for the nicest and most attractive features of accommodations, even so, my friend, we should sit down again and again to plan and to figure as to just how this home of ours remains Christian. It doesn't happen automatically.



Ø One thing more---you can never do it by yourself. No set of parents, no matter how devout they may be, can ever keep their home Christian--on their own. There must always be the reliance upon the help of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus kept promising..."After I'm gone, the Holy Spirit is going to come, and He will help you." There's no such thing as a 'do it yourself' Christian home---you do it always by the Help of God. And when this home of yours is to be Christian, it becomes Christian because Jesus Christ is on the inside of your home. All of us may reach the age when we especially appreciate memories of childhood. Indelibly etched upon the fabric of my heart and mind is the painting that someone had given our home. It's the picture of Jesus Christ, standing at the door of someone's house. He's on the outside, and He's raising His hand to knock; and even as a child, I had figured this thing out....He'll never get on the inside of that house, until someone on the inside opens the door. And that home never has a right to be called Christian, until Jesus Christ is on the inside.

Beloved, there might come to you, now, the very subtle temptation of leaving Jesus Christ in Saint Luke Church....He's here--there's no mistaking that fact....but don't run the risk of leaving Him here. Take Him all the way home with you.....and when you get home, don't close the door until He's inside. That's the way a home becomes Christian. I, frankly, don't know any other way.

"LIKE A BOOK THAT IS SEALED"

The sermon, entitled, "Like A Book That Is Sealed," is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day and the text, the 11th and 12th verses of the 29th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:  
And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned."

I'm not so sure that Isaiah was pleased with the reaction that came while he was preaching. In the first place, he was saying some things that men did not want to hear. And once they discovered that this was the note of his sermon, the congregation began to dwindle; and it seemed as though there wasn't a single soul who remained to hear the end of the preacher's sermon. It was then, I presume, that he became a bit impatient with them, and understandably so--when he tried to analyze their reaction.

Now this is what he had said: he had told them that God was going to bring judgment upon Jerusalem....he said that the day would come when armies would rise up and march against this city called 'peace'....he had told them that their cities would be laid waste. This they did not want to hear--this they found incredible! God allow them to receive such treatment?....God allow their city, named for peace, to be destroyed by war? Weren't they God's chosen people? How, in God's name, could this thing happen? So they reasoned. And because they did not hear it and because they did not want to hear it, they didn't even give the preacher a chance to finish his sermon in their hearing; or if he did get a chance to finish it while they were still there, they gave it no attention.

Now, interestingly enough, this is the way he ended his sermon....he said,

..."Even though the armies will march against Jerusalem, and even though destruction might be the order for the day, God will step in--God will decree deliverance--this, too, is a part of the story".....and then, much to the preacher's chagrin, he discovered that they stood in front of him as people who were absolutely insensitive to what he had been saying. And he analyzed it this way...."Well, you--you're like men who have become drunk, but you haven't been drinking.....you're like men who have been made blind--made blind because they blinded themselves.....you're in a stupor because you've stupified yourselves!"

Then he said something like this....."All of this God wants you to know, and all of this God has already told you....Now do you know what you're like?--you're like people being handed a book, and when the man gives the book over to someone who can read, he says, 'Read this,' and the man says, 'I cannot read it because the book is shut--it's sealed--it's not open'.....or you're like a man to whom a book is being given, this man can't read, but you offer him the book just the same, and you say, 'Read it,' and he gives the only answer he can give, he says, 'I cannot read.'"

Now you know, of course, don't you, that the net result is the same in both instances. A man who cannot read, handed a book, the book remains closed; a man who can read, and handed a book, and does not open it and ~~does not~~ ~~read~~ unseal it, the result's the same. He who can read and does not read has little or no advantage over the man who cannot read. He who has a book and does not read it has little or no advantage over the man who doesn't have the book. He who hears God's word and does not obey, has little or no advantage over the man who hadn't heard. This is what got under Isaiah's skin. This is what made him speak to them impatiently...."While you are God's people--God has chosen you--God has promised you certain things--God has told you certain things....but you remain insensitive".....and he was greatly disturbed by their insensibility.

Try as I may, I can't get away from a very practical application that's inherent in this text. This part of the sermon is being written by the Pew. For each of us, to a large degree, possesses the Book; and for all too many of us, the Book that we possess is like a book that is sealed---the Bible which goes unread--unopened. God wants us to know what He is like; God wants us to know His nature and His character....and we do not know it. God wants us to know His will, and if we do know it, we don't obey it because the Book is still, to us, as a book that is sealed.

Now since I am one of you, why don't you let me speak in your behalf? Just for a moment now, turn this pulpit around and let it be the voice of the pew.....

"These are the reasons, sir, why the Book remains unread--unopened...we'll tell you.....

The print, the format, the style----is far from being attractive. The novel that lies alongside of it has a very colorful jacket--a rather scintillating synopsis--we are immediately given some kind of an inducement to read; and the format and the style--oh, the composition is most desirable. But the Bible....impersonal--black--small print--verse after verse, artificial division....we find it so difficult to open the Bible....because it remains so unattractive to our eyes.....

Reason #2: (Even as I recall some of these reasons given by William Neal in his book entitled, "Rediscovery of the Bible")---Reason #2: So much of the language of the Bible is unintelligible to us. Some of it is veiled....why even when Jesus was preaching His parables, He had to stop and explain to them what He was saying. Now this, sir, is the situation in which we find ourselves, too. Ever so frequently we read a page and it just doesn't make sense to us. Take those chapters in Leviticus--a hand-book on the slaughtering of animals for the sacrifice!

Reason #3: The Bible remains to us as a book that is sealed, a book that's unopened, because it talks about things that happened thousands of years ago--in places that we haven't visited.....4,000 years ago--2,000 years ago.....and for the moment, this reason seemed to take on a great degree of credulity; for there is the pressure of

the last 50 years coming in upon us. We are appalled when we stop to think about what happened in the last 50 years; and it becomes increasingly difficult to become interested at all in any kind of history that happened before 1900. For any of us who have lived at least four decades now--five decades....why we've gone through two World Wars.....look at all of the inventions that's created for us one gadget after another--one device after another. Think how the world has shrunk! Why it's an amazing thing--simply to count the things that have happened in 50 years! How, then, does one become interested in things that happened so many years before that? You see what we've done? We've suffered from the fact that we are a generation that's lost its sense of history.

Reason #4: And it comes so quickly upon this one....ours is the age of outer space. Out there, there are worlds---think of it!--other worlds beside our own!.... and yet, when I read the Bible, I talk about our world, as though this were the most important thing that God ever made. And I'm led to believe that I should focus my eye upon man....and to believe that man is the crowning glory of God's creation on this, His favorite planet. It just doesn't make too much sense any more. Why I can hardly believe what's going on out there and yet I know it's out there and then you want me to become excited--just about earth? and man? and especially man, 4,000---2,000 years ago? You want me to get excited about Jericho? and Nazareth? and Bethlehem? Shiloh? Jerusalem?.....Why, I can't even keep up with what's happening in Moscow and Paris and Washington.....all of this is so much more exciting than something that happened so many years ago. What is there in the Bible that can half compare with Cape Canaveral? So we reason, you see....so we talk to ourselves!

Ah! ...and I've saved the last one until the end, because that's where it belongs. Read the Bible? I haven't time! Haven't time? So much to be done!....I can hardly get up early enough to begin the day's work....and when the day is ended, so many other things press upon me. What! Sit still! And read a book?...And the Bible, of all books?

Has the voice from the pew echoed and re-echoed sufficiently now? Is this why, all too often, the Bible which you possess remains as a book that is sealed? As a book that is not open?

The pulpit has to be turned around, now, You've had it long enough. Let me assume, once more, the role of the preacher. Let me speak as sternly and as severely as I can...under God, and by God. We'll take each one of those arguments---how we choose that the Bible remain as a book that is sealed.....

It's unattractive.....Would you accept this as an excuse from a doctor who refuses to read his Materia Medica--because it isn't bound in morocco and have some very fancy inscribing on the outside, and the inside beautifully embossed?...Would you excuse a lawyer who refuses to turn to his Blackstone--because its pages are not attractively bound and printed and have a distinctive format that says, "Come--read me!"...."How can you keep away?".....

You say the Bible has language that is untelligible.....Did you ever read the 23rd Psalm?...the 13th chapter of First Corinthians?...the Sermon on the Mount?... There is so much in the Bible that one can easily understand---concentrate on that!..

You say we've lost our sense of history?--I can't help it....Did it ever occur to you that history is also the handmaid of God--the hand-work of God? You say the Bible is a book about man?...and earth? You're mistaken, my friend....the Bible isn't a book about man---the Bible is a book about God....and how can you know the nature and character of God, unless you read about it? It is the Bible, through the Holy Spirit, that leads us to Jesus Christ.....

And you say you haven't time?.....We have the shortest working hours of any generation of working people. We have more things that save time than any other people on the face of the earth.....

Now let this also be said.....fundamentally, God is God. And this world belongs to God. And we'll never know how to live out our years and our days until we

know something of the nature and the character and the will of God. God says, "I want you to know my nature---I want you to know my will--I want you to know my character--and the Bible will help you".....and Isaiah could shake his preacher's finger at his congregation and say, "Here it is---you have been told all this about God before....why, now, are you stupified?" And even though you've read your Bible, some of your reading has been to commit the words to memory, and then you recall it by rote, and you fail to equate what you have read with life itself.....You can't do this with God! God says, "I want you to know what I'm like--I want you to know my nature, my character, my will....and if you don't read it from the Bible that you have, I'll raise up one army after another....I will show you!" This is not easy preaching.....this is an uncomfortable thought--to think that God himself should have to say to us, "I will show you!".....and that's exactly the thing that he did in Isaiah's day---to prove Himself....the finger of God sent armies into motion.

I have reached the age where I honestly believe that this is a wonderful time in which to live. But I do not say that because I speak out of optimism. I honestly shudder when I think what may lie ahead....living in an age that will forever seem to be on the brink of destruction--this is our world; and it seems to me I hear Isaiah preaching over my shoulder, saying, "But there are some things that need not be!.... God doesn't have to reach out and send armies into motion....He doesn't desire to bring destruction upon the face of the earth...He'd much rather have men and women know His will and His way--by reading about it from the Book, and then living by it! ...and if, having the Book, they do not read, then God will impress His finger upon the face of the earth in a way that remains indelible!"

Let me share this with you for what it may be worth.....a short while ago, in the city of New York, there was a meeting of the College of Physicians and Surgeons--- it was the 40th anniversary of the class that had originally numbered 175 doctors. When they met for this reunion, they discovered that 60 of the original class were

already dead--when they should have been in the very prime of life. One of the doctors stood up and said, "I move you, Mr. President, that I be permitted to ask a question.....How many of us who are here in the room right now, have had a physical examination within the past years?" Not a single hand went up--not even his own.

And then he said, "I'd like to make a motion, sir. I'd like to move the appointment of a committee especially charged with the responsibility of keeping the rest of us alive....they are to see to it that every single one of us gets a physical at least once a year." The committee soon discovered that the doctor who specialized in gall bladders had a gall bladder infection himself; the doctor who operated on hernias was suffering from such an affliction himself. Physician, heal thyself! Within the realm of possibility, here it is for you....and they passed it by!....for any number of reasons.

The truth is applicable to you and me, my friend. What do you know about the nature, the will and the character of God? Here it is! Is there any reason why you do not know? He who has the Bible and does not read it, has little or no advantage over the man who does not have a copy.



THE TIDE OF THE SPIRIT

The sermon this morning is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. It is entitled, "The Tide of the Spirit," and the text is the sixth verse of the 55th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call  
ye upon him while he is near."

I cannot tell you, right for the moment, the exact number of hours, months, days and years that the children of Israel remained in captivity in Babylon, but surely it must have seemed to them like an eternity--an endless period of time. And to think that all the while, when their hearts and souls were in Jerusalem, they were physically held in bondage. They found it very, very difficult--in fact, they could not do it at all....sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

Then, because they were God-fearing people, they kept praying to God that this time of captivity would come to an end....that God, in His own way, would allow them to go back home. How many prayers they must have made....."O God, hear the lament of our souls....take us back home, where we belong....let us walk again amid familiar places.....let us rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.....O God, you can do it--hear our prayer" .....prayer after prayer was made. But God, for one reason or another, did not seem to appear upon their horizon. God seemed to be afar off. And if He should appear only occasionally, He had His own way of disappearing right quickly. God was not near at hand.

And then one day they discovered the forces, the armed power, of the king of the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus descended upon Babylon; and for one reason or another, once he had taken conquest, he said to these people who had been held in bondage, "You're free! You can go back home! I deliver you!"

What joy they must have known in their hearts, as now only a remnant, they prepared to make the long and arduous journey home. And do you suppose now, that

in their eagerness, someone said, "How wonderful that Cyrus should deliver us! Why don't we appoint a special committee, and this committee will wait upon the king and this committee will say, 'Thank you, honorable sir--it is by your hand that we have been delivered....If it were not for you, Cyrus, King of the Persians, we would not be making, now, our journey home.'"

Had you and I been there, surely we would have been constrained to react that way, wouldn't we? After all....it was the armed power and the might of Cyrus that came to the city! After all....it was Cyrus and his troops that conquered the Babylonians! After all....if he had not opened the gates, we could not journey home! But whether that happened or not, I am inclined to think, knowing human nature as I do, that had we been part of the scene, this is what we might have done.

But do you know what really happened? There was one man, Isaiah by name, a man to whom God had given rich and wonderful prophetic insight....and Isaiah now, as self-appointed under God, committee of one, went to one group of people after another, and whatever else he might have said, it's been preserved for us in this classic expression...."Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" ..... And this is what Isaiah was saying...."You've been asking God to loom upon the horizon?.....you've been asking God to hear your prayers?.. ...you've been asking God to do something?.....I tell you, God has done something, and you've been foolish enough to see only the hand of Cyrus---you want to thank Cyrus---you want to thank the Medes and the Persians---you want to say that they have delivered you.....I, Isaiah, say to you, that God's been in this thing!--God has guided the hand of Cyrus!--Cyrus has been a tool of the Almighty!--God's been right here, in the very thick of this!.....this is not an act of Cyrus--this is an act of God!"

Human as we are, we are always prone to think that the things that we can see deserve the understanding that should be given them, only for a human level. When I was in Prague in 1947, I received a distinct shock to my sensitive American patriotic

spirit. I had remembered, as I headed on the Oriental Express to Prague, that Woodrow Wilson had been somewhat of the designer and the architect behind the republic that became Czechoslovakia. I had remembered that it was here in Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania, that our Liberty Bell proclaimed the new freedom of the Czech people. Why, when I arrived in Prague, I got off at Wilson Station, named for our World War I president. But when I participated in some interviews and conferences in school classrooms, I did not see the picture of Woodrow Wilson; but oddly enough, and as a direct jolt to my sensitive soul, I saw the picture of Lenin.....and Stalin.

And when I went near Charles University and then near the Charles River Bridge, I saw monuments, not of bronze and marble, because such material was not yet available, with all the shortages after the war....but in very well-cared garden plots, they had made the huge Russian star---the hammer and the sickle--by placing geraniums and one flowering shrub after another in perfect design. And I said to my friends, "What does this mean?" "Oh, don't you know? The Russians were our liberators....they came in and freed our country and they sent the Nazis on the march....they rid us of them and we were free once more."

Well now, for some of us who have been reading history, we know exactly why it happened that the Russians were liberators of Prague. We know that that was according to a certain design, that is not now to our liking. But for the people in Prague, they saw the hand of the Russian, and it was the Russian who liberated them...and they said their "thank-yous" in that way. Because we are human, we are always quick to see the human being who comes soonest on the horizon; and because we are human, we will say "Thank you" to a human being before we will say "Thank-you" to God.

It is one of the weaknesses of the human mind that we forever deal with things horizontally. It is one of the weaknesses of the human spirit that we have a way of forgetting the past and becoming insensitive to the future--and think only of what is in front of us at the present moment. Cyrus was the hand that freed the people held in captivity, but his hand was guided and directed by God's hand. That's what Isaiah was trying to tell these people.

"The Tide of the Spirit" (4)

The older I become, the more respect I have for historians. You may readily understand why I could underline so easily certain statements by Paul Scherer in his very significant book called, "Event in Eternity," which is an excellent appraisal of the life and the teachings of Isaiah. Paul Scherer tells us, in that book, how there was a certain man who wanted to evaluate certain professional people and their own belief in God. So he sent out one questionnaire after another to journalists, educators, scientists, historians.....then the replies came back. And he discovered that it was only among the historians that there was the highest percentage of plain and profound faith in the purposes of God. For the historian has a way of reading history, looking backward--looking forward....and trying to discover always a golden thread which is not of the making of men.

But God hasn't bestowed that only on historians. Let me say this quite parenthetically....the other night at a meeting of one of the committees of Church Council, after we had discharged our obligation, we sat around in a very fine spirit of comradeship, and we were talking about what did not happen at Paris and what might have happened at Paris. Some of us seemed to indicate that since our plane was felled by the Russians, we had lived almost a lifetime in these two weeks or more, because we had come to appreciate that we were dealing, today, with some of the things out of which wars are made. Then one of the Councilmen said that a cab driver, a Negro, had said to him---'Well, he wasn't much on learning, and he didn't feel that his life, itself, amounted to very much, but there is one thing that he did believe.... ...that in the end, right would always be right, and God Himself would see that it did happen.' This was the kind of thing that Isaiah was trying to tell his country-people.."No matter what it is that you think has just happened, can't you see God in this thing?....Can't you see beyond Cyrus to the very face of God?"

Now, I've come to you this morning with all the ardor of my soul, to share with you what, perhaps, all of us feel---that there are times when we pray for God to do something, and it doesn't seem as though God is very eager to make His presence

## "The Tide of the Spirit" (5)

known.....and if His presence is there, it seems to be veiled. You and I have had that happen to us. But following in the footsteps of a prophet, I would ask you to remember that when God does make Himself felt, for goodness' sake, don't miss it! That's what Isaiah wanted these people to know....."This was God's doing!....quit talking about Cyrus!....God is in this thing!"

Now, with that as a bit of historical background, with the few minutes that remain in this sermon, may I plead with you, that God is always near....but, for one reason or another, you and I do not always perceive His presence. But when that moment of moments does come....when in no unmistakable fashion you can feel that He is there....seize upon that moment, and make the most of it! Someone has said, "Earth is crammed with Heaven and every common bush is afire with God, but only the man who sees, takes off his shoes and worships...the rest stand around and eat blackberries."

God is always within reach. And there may be such a thing as the tide of the spirit, the ebb and flow of His love, as far as we human beings are concerned; but whenever it does happen, may it be to you as it happened to me, when, waiting, hour after hour atop an Alpine summit to see the Matterhorn and the Jungfrau, suddenly the clouds disappeared and there, for a moment, in all the glory and splendor, these sun-crowned peaks!....and I tell you, I made the most of it, because I did not know when it might ever happen again!

I like to think that when we come to Saint Luke Church, some of us have made ready our souls for a vision of God. While He is always within reach, we are not always ready to make the necessary preparation--we are not always found in the atmosphere by which He can best be appreciated. I would not give my life to another single hour, in preparation to the return to this altar and to this pulpit, if I did not fervently believe that, here, there is such a thing as the flow of the Spirit... in full tide....when God's presence can be felt....His face can be seen....and His voice can be heard.....in a way, perhaps, that you and I are not wont to hear or to see or to feel Him elsewhere. I beg you, make the most of it!

"The Tide of the Spirit" (6)

And to that end, I am charged with the responsibility, under God, to ask you this question.....ere you came to this place, did you say to yourself...."In the quiet beauty of Saint Luke Church, I shall know the tide of the Spirit...I am going there to find God, and I shall make the most of that hour!"?

I know what the world is like outside of these doors. I know full well the temptation and the trial that any single soul who's worth his salt must face. I know how great is the impact of the devil---upon any single one of us.....and I also know that in an hour such as this, God has a way of breaking through. I, for one, have come here to find Him---to make sure that I don't lose Him out there! "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.....for the Lord is gracious and full of compassion."

Our Father and Our God.....

Thou hast seen how we have come to this place this day, and as an act of worship we have brought something with our hands. But help us to understand that the offering most acceptable in Thy sight is the surrender of the heart...the dedication of the mind and the spirit....the offering of a life.

Now we know that Thou dost afford us a variety of ways by which we can offer our lives in Thy Name.....

.....Some men take a slide rule and, as they work with this, they offer their lives and their talents in Thy Name.....

.....Some men reach for bricks and a trowel and mortar--they build a market-place, a home, a cathedral--and they offer it in Your Name.....

.....Some men can take words and make them march across the page of a book so that, in truth, minds of men may be surveyed and sustained.....

.....Some there are, who by a healing touch which you allow them to know, can minister to the disease, to those who suffer.....

.....And every now and then, O God, you put your finger upon someone and, once you have done that, he offers his life to Thee and surrenders his heart, as a Shepherd and Bishop of men's souls....try as he may, he can't be anything else. He may have feet of clay....he may minister, possessed with all the frailty of human nature....yet he cannot keep from a pulpit--he forever gravitates toward an altar. For this thrust of Thine, placed upon one man, I give Thee thanks for all that know it....for their influence for good upon all of us who claim it.

Wilt Thou be pleased, O God, in the presence of these people whom Thou hast given to me now to shepherd, wilt Thou be pleased to accept my gratitude for their trust and for their witness to Thy love.....wilt Thou accept, now, my re-dedication....for unto Thee shall be all honor and glory in a world that has no ending.....

"FROM ON HIGH"

The sermons, for the most part, since last September here in Saint Luke Church, have been preached upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. Today's sermon is entitled, "From On High." It is based upon the 15th verse of the 32nd chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"until the spirit be poured upon us from on high,"

Whenever a prophet stood up to speak, he invariably exercised one of three different functions....if he stood up to speak to proclaim the truth as he knew it and as it had been given to him, and if he spoke in a very forthright fashion, he was recognized as a forth-teller--forth--someone who from a group of people emerged, secured for himself a rostrum, and then spoke in no uncertain manner to the congregation that had assembled. A prophet was a forth-teller--no hesitation on his part--what he had to say, he would say, positively and clearly.

When he would also stand up to speak, it was made known to him and to other people that he was a for-teller--that is, for--that all that he was saying, he was saying for somebody else--that his sermon wasn't something that he had designed from his own mind. Never would he allow his congregation to think that what he was telling them was something that began and ended through him to them. The prophets who stood up to preach were men who had placed upon them the burden of the Lord. Scripture puts it this way...."The burden of the Lord was laid upon me"....and when the preacher stood up to preach, he would say ever so often, "Thus says the Lord"...so, therefore, when he would stand up to preach, he would be telling people what they should know, in behalf of God, Himself.

Now every now and then, when the prophet would preach, he would be a predictor, and assume the role of a fore-teller--fore--and I suppose, quite often, this was the most fascinating, the most intriguing, of the roles that he assumed. For people



the world over seem to be interested in the things to come. Jesus had a way of holding people in the hollow of His hand, when they would come to Him and say, "Prophecy--tell us about tomorrow!" Maybe human nature reacts that way because none of us, at the moment, seems to have any responsibility for tomorrow...to talk about the present moment in which we find ourselves so definitely associated---that's one thing.....and to talk about the past, in which we have also been involved, is one thing.....but most of us are safe when it comes to talking about tomorrow, because we may have no assurance that we will be held responsible for it when tomorrow comes.

The prophet, sometimes, when he predicted things to come, would talk about doom, destruction and death. Their world was going to be destroyed. The Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians---they would come, lay hold upon their cities, level them to the ground! But every now and then, the prophet would stand up and he would paint for them a wonderful picture--a picture of a world of peace and tranquility. Why, Isaiah even went so far as to say...."Why, it's going to be a kind of world in which any man who owns live-stock...." (and for many people in his day, live-stock were their most precious possession)....he said, "any man who owns live-stock--why, you can just let them freely graze....his sheep and his cattle--they can go wherever they want to--no fences--no constant watching after them....every man will respect every other man's property....it's going to be a world as wonderful as that!"

How intently they must have listened! For most of us go on dreaming of a world that will be so different from this world in which you and I are imprisoned... ..a world free from fear, frustration and failure---how wonderful!....a world where everything is exactly as it ought to be! I think sometimes, and I'm ashamed that I have to tell you this.....that some people hold on very rigidly to the concept of heaven--not primarily for religious reasons--not because they will enjoy the wonderful bliss of seeing their Saviour face to face--not perhaps because of the blessed thought of being re-united with those whom they love in Christ's name....not because

they may have the assurance that when they have ended their earthly pilgrimage, Jesus Christ will give to them the victor's wreath.....these, I say to you, are the religious reasons that ought to motivate our happy thought about heaven.....  
.....But, for a good many people perhaps, the thought of heaven means so much to them because it will be a day when, as they put it, "Everything is going to be exactly as it ought to be....no failure....no fear....no frustration!" What a wonderful thing to realize the consummation of bliss!

Well, you and I are little different from the people in the day of Isaiah. We, too, would have listened intently...."Speak on, preacher---speak on!--tell us some more about things to come....paint the picture as rosy as you possibly can!" And Isaiah did. Read for yourselves his prophetic utterances concerning this day of bliss. But don't overlook the fact that Isaiah, being true to his commission, said that that day will come...only when God's spirit is poured from on high. This wonderful day, when this world will be as heaven itself, will come to pass only as it comes from the top down--not necessarily from the bottom up. Isaiah said, "The spirit of the Lord will come upon us." This is very significant, because for the most part, when you and I work and dream and plan for the better world, we always want to build it from the bottom up, and we always want to use our plan and our material; and whether we are willing to admit it or not, presumably we want also to be the architect and the designer; and this is a fundamental weakness of man. He may dream, he may plan, he may scheme....and the new world that he fashions for himself is all too often a world fashioned by the limitation of man. Isaiah says, "If you want this new world, remember it must be ~~done~~ by God's spirit, and the spirit of God must come from on high."

It is always a healthy thing for a man to be rebuked, when he ought to be rebuked, and the truth should never hurt unless it has a right to hurt. Let me give you a page out of my own book.....1947, in midsummer, I was riding along the

English country-side--a perfectly lovely day. A Britisher made note of my presence, struck up a conversation....his purpose--to ascertain my impression of what was happening in the early post-war years in Britain. So I proceeded to tell him. I had heard about the nightly blitz....how Jerry came over night after night and vomited his hell from the heavens. Now I had seen the evidence of what had happened. Great gaps in city blocks.....building after building, nothing but a pile of rubble. But I had also seen how the British had come in so quickly with their mopping-up operation--almost incredible to see how certain areas had been cleared of debris, for the most part....and I had also been given to understand, through some contacts that had been established, how these devastated areas were to be rebuilt--a new London would arise in certain quarters, the like of which London had never known before.

So I gave him to understand how tremendously I was impressed by the Britain of the future, speaking in terms, of course, of brick, mortar, prints on a paper---and then he cut me down to size....noticing my clerical collar, he said, "Do you mean to tell me, sir, that you have nothing to say about the souls of these people who live in this new city? Do you mean to tell me that you have no concern as to whether or not the spirit of the Britisher will be any different than the spirit of the Britisher two decades ago? Aren't you concerned at all about the new spirit in the new world? Do you freeze your thoughts only on brick and mortar and city blocks?".....

Then I remembered what that wonderful poet had written one time--Edwin Markham--

"Why build these cities glorious,  
If man unbuilded goes?  
In vain we build the work,  
Unless the worker also grows."

.....We who are concerned with the new world--we who would shape and

fashion it, must remember that the only thing that really makes the new world.....is a new spirit.

I have traveled in metropolitan areas even as you have traveled in metropolitan areas, and the city planners have shown us where they have built anew upon the sloppy, decaying tenements of yesteryear, and with pride and satisfaction they have shown us the new buildings--- clean, chaste, functional.....and have you said to yourself, "The buildings are clean, the environment seems to be different....."....and where's the man that's been brave enough to ask the question....."but has there been any change in the people?" Important as slum clearance may be, it is of little value unless it has an effect upon the spirit of the people.

The new world must come through new people. Because we are as human as we are, we are so prone to level off at the human level; and it is absolutely amazing to discover, sometimes, how much brain power we have available to tackle the immediate problem---that no matter how brilliant a man may be, he is still a man--a human being; and he may bring to the drawing board and he may bring to his planning for the future all the weaknesses and the frailties of human flesh, despite his learning.

Only men of a new spirit, possessed by God, can make a new world. History itself can bear grim evidence to this sad fact. Every now and then, we read some by-line--rather some statement that appears as a foot-note. Do you know that some historians, I think, can build up a pretty good case...that the seeds for World War II were sown at the peace table of World War I; and they may offer as a kind of evidence something of this nature.....

.....When that Presbyterian minister's son who became President of

the United States went to represent us at the peace table at Versailles...

.....Do you know what a great problem he had on his hand, keeping his own soul in check?....realizing that when his signature, representing the United States, would be affixed to the treaty, that they were, to all intents and purposes, designing a new world?.....

.....Do you know, keeping himself in check, they tell us that he refused--the only representative of the Allies who refused--to make a tour around the French country-side?...."because" he said, "When I sit down at that peace table, I do not want my mind and my spirit to be prejudiced by the terrible destruction that I am certain to see."

.....Do you also know that, when he did say something at the peace conference, inculcating the idealism that was so typical of him, with a sneer and a ridicule, one of the other representatives from a nation as great, if not at that moment greater than the United States, simply said, "Why, you speak like Jesus Christ."

When one reads this foot-note to history, he may have cause to believe the seeds of World War II were sown at the peace table of World War I. You cannot build the new world without the spirit of changed men.

Can you take another one? I remember that quiet Sunday afternoon here in the States--December 7--and the word came--what had happened at Pearl Harbor. When I turned the pages of history, I cannot escape facing the fact that there was such a thing as an Exclusion Act....that once upon a time this nation of ours said, to two other nations on the face of the earth, "You people are not to become citizens of the United States of America." You just can't build a new world by slapping people in the face....people who are sensitive to

insult, because they had this thing imbred in them for centuries. And as far as I was concerned, in my own limited fashion, I could not possibly fail to associate the stab in the back on December 7 with the slap on the face of an Exclusion Act. You just can't build a new world without a new spirit.

Another one? Some few weeks ago, some of us accepted a very worthy invitation to sit in with a group of people representing the Silver Spring congregations and synagogues. We were called together as a seminar on human relations. We were asked to give some thought, as objectively and as earnestly as we could, to this very pesky matter of race relations--as we in Silver Spring, this lovely community of ours, should quicken our consciences. Some of us were greatly impressed by the people who were there--the type of person who came. Some of us were likewise impressed by the quality of the program--and the key-note address, so eloquently and capably delivered.

Then we divided into small groups of eight or ten, to share some thought about this problem of human relations, especially as it affects one race in particular. And then it occurred to at least one person... ..we had been in session for almost two hours, and at no time had there been an overt gesture made, by which we would ask Almighty God to come from on high and to captivate our spirits and to possess our minds, so that when we sat down to deal with these things, we might look beyond our own horizon.

I'm not indicting anyone, and I'm not willing, at the same time, to accept the token that, "Well, all of this was presumed".....there comes a moment in every man's life when it becomes a very salutary thing for him to fall upon his knees and say...."God, I am a human being....and I have all the weaknesses of frail human flesh....and, God,

I am prejudiced....God, I can't see clearly....God, I am somewhat of a prisoner of my own situation....." .....We'll never build a new world, without a new spirit, and that new spirit has to be God's!

I listened, unto edification, to the news report on "Who Speaks For The South?" To me, the most refreshing thing was the voice of the Mayor of that great city of Atlanta. He said that the thing that meant most to him, as I remember what he said, that he was able to assess a new spirit on the part of certain people....and that new spirit was the most promising thing, for him, by which this whole problem might eventually be solved.

You want a new world, my friend? It takes new people to make a new world. And people are made new only by the Spirit of God. This is a weakness of man....he is not satisfied, unless he has a plan--he is not satisfied unless he has a blue-print....and he will devote so much of his energy and his enthusiasm to getting a plan and a strategy and a blue-print---and then sometimes he is disappointed when he comes to God, because nowhere between the covers of this **Book** will you find God's blue-print.....in direct detail for 1960. God does not deal in blue-prints! God does not deal specifically in plans....God's speciality is people---people possessed by His Spirit.

Every now and then, someone comes to me and he says, "Pastor, what are your plans for the future of Saint Luke Church?"---that question that should be put to the Pastor of the church, as well as to the Church Council, and as well as to the people of the parish. There are some things that I've put down on paper, as you well know, but I must report to you that I'm not terribly concerned about specific details of plans for the future of this church....as much as I am concerned that the Spirit of Jesus Christ, from on high, should so captivate the

"From On High" (9)

people of this parish, that when the moment for decision comes, for the fashioning of any plan, whatever it may be, we shall be made adequate---this I most certainly believe.

The future belongs to those who will claim it by the Spirit of God, if the future is to be any different. Otherwise, we'll have the same old tired, sin-ridden world. Isaiah said, "That new world?--It's going to happen....when God's Spirit comes from on high."

*But the time grows short, Pastor. How long will God be patient with us?*

*"Thoughts on the German"*



June 5, 1960

"Thoughts on Pentecost"

--a study of the factors prompting  
its occurrence

Text - - - "They were all with one accord in one place.....and they were  
all filled with the Holy Spirit - - " (Acts 2: 1-4)

When reading some of the wonderful things that have happened before our day, the temptation may come to us to feel sorry for ourselves. The old devil "every" raises its head and we feel somewhat short-changed by not having lived in an earlier time.

This could be the plight to the earnest-minded, as he recalls the Day of Pentecost. What happened then, we say to ourselves, is what we need so much to have happen in our day. 'Twas on that remarkable day that the believers in Christ received promised power. Now the gift of the Spirit is the gift of Power, and it is power we need. "We need that spark of fire that will make our message a living flame. We need the breath that will bring new life to that which is, with all its weakness, the Body of Christ."

It has been said, and surely it ought to be said again, that after almost 1,930 years of the Christian Church we have so much more than they had at the very beginning - save one thing. Alas, it is the most needed thing. We have program and personnel but we haven't the Power.

Now history has been known to repeat itself. I would be numbered with those who ardently believe that Pentecost could happen again. Some day some one may be able to establish a case that every outstanding event that has ever occurred is in itself a symbol of what is forever going on at the very heart of life itself. Its repetition depends solely upon the recurrence of the necessary conditions.

"Thoughts on Pentecost" (2)

To that end let us consider the people and the factors themselves which formed the basis for Pentecost. As we think of these disciples in the Upper Room before the Spirit came, we realize that there are conditions to be fulfilled.

Let us begin by observing that "these were not just a group of people who had sauntered in out of the street for a casual hour of worship." They are not people who "just happened" to have a free Sunday morning and without the pressure of other claims, found it a very easy thing to get to a church gathering. To the contrary, they had met first of all the basic requirement for Pentecost by being constrained to keep the meeting. They had remembered the word of the Lord - -

"Tarry - - wait in Jerusalem - - "

Shall we say that they were men and women of a common loyalty - loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ and obedient to His will. They remembered what He said to them when they had last seen Him. Had we somehow stationed someone at the door of the Upper Room where all 120 had gathered in order to put to them the question: What brings you here - - they would have answered to a man - - the Lord Jesus Christ! If Pentecost is to happen again - then that question will have to be answered by us in the same way. Is that what brought you here today? Have you come because you've an appointment with Jesus Christ that you wish to honor? that you have no desire of breaking?

This parish has not become so large but what on a Monday morning the Pastor can't give himself to a recollection of pew after pew. Now and then he notes an absentee. Sadly he may be given to understand that the absenteeism exists because of some difference between members or because of a failure to fully appreciate the plans or purposes of the parish. Pentecost would never have occurred had Matthew, James, Peter or John allowed the difference in their personali-

### "Thoughts on Pentecost" (3)

ties to keep them from an appointment with their Lord!

At the first session of every New Member Class here at Saint Luke Church we spell it out quite clearly. The primary relationship of the church member should be to Jesus Christ and the membership in a particular congregation is the expression of this fact. Because we commit ourselves to Him, we draw toward one another and work with one another.

The second factor or force which characterized the Day of Pentecost is found in the truth that they were men and women of a common experience. Cast over every one of them was the shadow of Calvary. Each of them at the time of the Crucifixion had been exposed to the same test of discipleship - and each of them had failed. "Forsake - betray - deny" - - - these in turn were the varying degrees of their failure. When they came together to that room in Jerusalem - they all knew that they had not measured up to Him. Even John the Beloved Disciple, waiting at the foot of the Cross, did so in silence! When we gather as Christians do we come in this like-manner of failure? Do we see ourselves - each of us in turn - no whit better than the person in front of us, behind us or along side of us when it comes to the main test of discipleship?

In the third place we dare not forget that they came - each of them - expecting something tremendous to happen. Christ had made a promise to them and they honestly believed it would be fulfilled. Does the average church-goer today attend services with an expectant heart? Did you come to this place today anticipating some gift of God's Spirit?

And finally - it was in their hearts to receive a promised blessing. The key word here is receive. The Christian cannot do for himself what only God can give. The Bible uses such significant words in connection with the Spirit - as "breathe" - "bestow" - "give" - "pour" - "descend." The Spirit comes to us -

"Thoughts on Pentecost" (4)

we are to receive it. They came prepared to accept God's gracious visitation. They left their gathering with one paramount fact - God alive in Jesus Christ! Is that what you will take with you today?

Pentecost can and could happen again. It could happen here. Next Sunday?

"TO YOUR CHILDREN"

The sermon is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. It is entitled, "To Your Children;" and the text is a portion of the 6th and 7th verses of the 6th chapter of the book of Deuteronomy:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:  
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine  
heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.  
And this I command thee to teach diligently to your  
children."

Each of us, I presume, carries away with him unforgettable memories of any group of Christians with whom he has been privileged to associate. With the three Christian congregations that God has allowed me to associate in my life-time, I, too, carry with me rememberable pictures of certain people.

In the church of my childhood, there was Harrison W. App, cashier of the town's only bank; and when he came, especially at the mid-week service, I felt as though God were right in the room, just the way Harry App was able to pray and to talk with Him in our behalf. My first real introduction to a man who could make God so intimate, I daresay, was the introduction that came to me through this man.

In the second parish with which I was associated, there was John B. Grove. The last time I saw him, 96 years of age, he looked the part, veritably, of a patriarch--there was so much of his physical appearance that made it easy to believe of him as one stepping out of the Old Testament....long flowing white hair--and when he stood up to speak in Messiah's Church, none of us ever doubted the reality of God.....an almost completely God-dedicated, God-possessed individual....  
..I honestly have never seen his kind.

One day I made bold to say to his daughter, "How do you account for a man like your father?" And immediately she replied, "Well, Grand-daddy was a mighty

fine man".....As simple as all that!.....'To get a man like my father, you begin with my grandfather--the kind of a home he made for his children was more or less the kind of home in which he had been reared and trained.' Her grandfather had passed on to him, in no uncertain manner, a witness, an abiding reality, of the fact of God. And John B. Grove, in his own way, was allowed to transmit it to the children who made up his household.....father to son.

This has helped me to understand...this text, which serves as the background for this sermon now....."And you shall teach this thing diligently to your children....." You know the historical background, don't you? For about forty years, now, Moses, God's appointed leader of the Children of Israel, had been directing these people in preparation for the day when they would establish themselves in the promised land. Now as they were nearing that day, God made it plain to Moses that he should charge his people that they should be ready to establish themselves in the promised land. God had had a lot of trouble with the Children of Israel while they were wandering around....when He had them almost all to Himself, on the march. And only God Himself knew what was in store when, once they were established in the promised land, and would be literally fringed by all kinds of groups of people who were not God-fearing--many of them of a pagan kind of society.....they were the children of the promised ones--the land was to be theirs--and they were called for a unique purpose....and to guarantee that they would fulfill their mission, God says to Moses, "Make it plain to them!"

.....This is the unique thing about it---that they had been introduced to God, and there is only one true God---and that, as a people, they should love Him...with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their might---this is a command! Then, that future generations may know this heritage, they are to transmit from one generation to another.

What would you do, my friend, if you had to devise a strategy by which you

wanted to perpetuate something that was quite unique? Suppose you had been charged with the responsibility that Moses knew? God had given something exceedingly wonderful to these people--of all the people on the face of the earth--now how could you make sure that they would not lose it? How would you make sure that succeeding generations would benefit by it? What would you do to guarantee that the light and the torch would never grow dim?

The older I become, the more I am impressed with the fact that God always deals with simple things in order to accomplish profound measures.....

.....no calling of a committee.....

.....no drafting of a resolution.....

.....no structuring a certain order.....

As simple as all this.....tell them that God is one---tell them that they are to love God with all that they have and all that they are---and then they are to make sure that their children get the same story.

Someone has said that, from cover to cover, (of the Bible) you have ever so much common sense. Someone has also said that religion is 'sanctified common sense.' What common sense you find here! One person tells another--the father tells the son. Why don't we allow these words to mean exactly what they should mean to us? ..... "You shall diligently teach it to your children".... now, that's the point at which you begin!. But before you do this, Moses, under God, said, "You must have it in your heart!".....Ah! Isn't that the point at which to begin? The parent cannot give what he does not have---you cannot share what you do not first possess. Make certain that you know God at first-hand...you become fully aware of the reality of His Presence.....you make it your business to have a knowledge of His basic character....you have God in here, first--that's the point at which to begin.....and once you know God, then you pass Him on to someone else, if one may reverently use that figure of speech.

Then, allowing these words to mean exactly as they appear, you diligently teach your children---you have a responsibility for your own. Don't concern yourself overmuch, at the beginning, with somebody else's children. It is a sad commentary upon present society that one may find a number of women and a number of men who do a half-decent job of other people's children, and may sometimes fall miserably short with those who are nearest at hand....."Don't bother me now, Susie---I've got to prepare my material that I'm going to use at the meeting tonight".....and it could be that it's a half-decent presentation, too--and there might be any number of other people who are benefited by that presentation.....it also could mean that Susie fails to get from someone ever so near at hand, what she ought to get---in a way that, under God, she might not get from anybody else! This is always the risk that we run in the programs of Christian Education through the Christian congregation. This is always the risk that we run with improving and extending the Pastor's catechetical class--there is always the subtle risk, you see, of allowing other people to do for our children, what ought to remain only as an implementation. There is no substitute---absolutely no substitute!---for the child-parent relationship, when it comes to first learning about God. This can remain an imperishable memory on the minds of those who are young.

I last saw the book about twenty years ago--I hope sometime to find it again on a book shelf....it was entitled, "Suzanna"...an interesting book about an interesting woman...Suzanna, the mother of two very famous sons--John and Charles Wesley. Suzanna had mothered at least seventeen children--not all of them lived to later adolescence. Somewhere in the book, as I remember it, the author refers to the fact that Suzanna Wesley made it her business, each day, to give undivided personal attention to the spiritual training of her children--she taught them the Bible....she taught them the stories of Jesus Christ....it was from her that they first learned about the wonderful love of God and the redempt-



ive act in Jesus Christ. And the author makes this comment somewhere in the book--that Suzanna did for her children what some other parents are perfectly willing to allow other people to do for their children.

You remember when Martin Luther prepared the Catechism? He did not say, "This catechism is being prepared primarily for pastors and teachers."....this Catechism was prepared by Martin Luther, that it could be taught by the head of the household. You are entitled to know the grim fact, my friend....we in Saint Luke Church spend two years, sometimes trying to teach boys and girls what they should have known, through their own parents, before they came to us. The command by God through Moses...."You!"....and He was pointing His finger at the parents...."shall diligently teach your children!"

This morning, at the close of this service, as happens practically every Sunday, a child will be named for Jesus Christ--a baptismal service takes place.....and in the Order for the Baptism of a Child, these words remain, as the pastor, having baptized the child, admonishes the parents....."You shall diligently teach them the Creed, The Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments...you shall bring them up in the way of the Lord....you shall bring them to God's House and see that they are brought up to lead a godly life, unto the day of Jesus Christ".....it is the parent, under God, who has so great a responsibility!

Let me tell you that I, recently, invariably tell every set of parents who present a child for baptism--it is a kind of personal word over and above the order that appears in the book of the church--"God smiles upon us broadly when He places into our life and into our love

the soul of a child, and as long as we live!.....speaking, now, to the parent....."as long as we live, we have no greater responsibility than the soul of a child."

Moses, by God, says to the people of Israel, "You shall diligently teach your children these things," and then he emphasizes it by saying that they shall talk about these things, the things of God, when they lie down, when they sit, when they walk, when they rise up .....now that doesn't necessarily mean that every time a father comes to see his child, that he reaches for the family Bible and has a formal Sunday School lesson---it simply means that talking about God should be just as natural as walking and sleeping, within the confines of their family circle. God, spelled out boldly and clearly, should become a living reality---God should loom upon the horizon of their life.

It was a thrilling moment, not too long ago, when we took a group of five boys from last year's confirmation class to Bethany for a retreat. We were talking about certain things, and one youngster reacted brilliantly, in this manner...."But it would seem to me," he said...."this should not be!"---because the thing to which we were referring, he thinks would be against the basic principles of the Christian religion. Now you look at that youngster the way I look at him, and behind those words you do not see the pastor of the church in this pulpit--pleased as I would be to claim a measure of credit.....you look at that youngster as I see him, and behind those words, you do not see the parish deaconess--pleased as I would be to allow her a measure of credit.....nor do you simply see his Sunday School teacher... ....I know the home from which this boy comes---his reaction was the

perfectly natural reaction to a youngster growing up where part of a daily conversation can be characterized by what is Christian principle and what is not Christian principle.

They were nearing the land of promise---they would have to co-exist with other people that did not know the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob....they would have to do business with people who did not know that such a thing as the Ten Commandments existed. God says,.. "...There is only one safe way---train the child!" There is a kind of parallel with today. The historian may permit us to believe that we, too, are bordering on a new world---tremendous change has taken place in the last fifty or one hundred years, politically, economically and socially---this is an age of upheaval. It is not a pleasant thought for me, personally, to realize that within the last fifty years, the one order in this world--the one order, the one group of people that's made the most severe impact upon society, bringing more people into their way of thinking, has been a political and economical order which is godless!

We are going to go on living in that kind of world--that, in itself, is not a happy prospect. What guarantee have we that what you and I have known, by the grace of God, may continue? A strategy is as old as Moses.....train up the child....expose him to the Grace of God.....allow him to become ever so familiar with God---this is our only hope, and for some of us, it could be that time is running out. For some of us parents of teen-agers, it could be that we can't go back and begin again....we're simply going to stand by, now, and wait and see the kind of man today's youngster can become--by the quality of the Christian training we have given him.

The principal of a local junior high school confided to a group of parents...."I am working with these teen-agers every day... ..I am not so sure that I am pleased with the prospect that they shall be commanding my world in the sunset years of my life!" Is that an acknowledgment of failure? Could it be a word to the wise? How can the Christian Church speak?

I am constrained to tell you this....I think it could be established that, percentage-wise, when you relate it to a particular group of people, the one group of people on the face of this earth who through parental training and nurture are brought into a knowledge of God---that one group of people that exceeds all others could be the Jewish group. It all began thousands of years ago, by a very simple process.....father to son. We who are Christian and have ever so much.....can we take a page from their book?

June 26, 1960

"THE FEAR OF THE LORD"

The sermon is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. It is entitled, "The Fear of the Lord" and the text is a portion of the 10th verse of the 9th chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:"

Talk about fearing God--you begin to deal with a word that is seemingly lost in the vocabulary of today's Christian. There are many words that a man might use today when he talks about God.....

...there are many people who are talking about "accepting"

Jesus Christ.....

...there are many people who'll talk about "loving" God.....

...there are many people who might even go so far as to reject God.....

...I am appalled sometimes to discover, in this day, the number of people who very brazenly flaunt before other people their refusal of God.....

...and there are some people who'll talk about ignoring God....  
....ignore, reject, accept, love.....but where is the man who talks about fearing God?....holding Him in awe--dread?....ascribing to Him only majesty?....keeping himself always at a respectable distance from this God, Who, from the very beginning, is high and lifted up?

It could be that the word lost in the vocabulary of many Christians, when they come to think about God, is the word fear. But, strangely enough, it's not lost in the vocabulary when they talk about other things. For ours is an insecure generation and we are insecure because we are afraid---afraid of almost anything and everything. Why do some

## "The Fear of the Lord" (2)

people mark the path that leads to a psychiatrist's couch?...because they're afraid!--basically insecure--and their fear centers very largely around themselves. Yes!--man knows what it is to be afraid of himself.

And there are some people who, when they go to bed at night, know nothing but discomfort, not for physical reasons...but there is an agony of soul, when all that they've ever been, begins to parade back and forth in front of them, and they are afraid of their past--the kind of a person they once were--and they're afraid that other people will find it out.

Yes, man is afraid--afraid of himself--afraid of his past--afraid of tomorrow....he doesn't know what it may bring. That's one reason why we go on being as conscious of social security as we are. We want to make certain that when tomorrow comes, we'll be cared for, and we don't know what tomorrow may bring and we're somewhat afraid of it.

Man is afraid--afraid of yesterday--afraid of tomorrow--afraid of himself.....he's afraid of other people, too. He's afraid of what they think. That's why he guards his words--that's why he's on his good behavior---he's afraid of what they might do. He never knows what the neighbor might be like who may move next door to him.

Man is afraid....let Khrushchev snarl once more, and we cringe from the Atlantic to the Pacific.....let him shake his fist pugnaciously, and the ripple of discomfort is spread abroad, from one state to another. We are afraid--we are afraid of what could happen in this world. Yes, man is afraid--almost of anything and everyone-----except God!.....and the world to come! All of these fears go

### "The Fear of the Lord" (3)

on besetting him, for the simple reason that he is no longer afraid of God. I submit to you this morning---let him fear God, and all these other fears will begin to vanish, or they shall no longer be as rigid and severe--not nearly as important as he allows them to be right now. All of these other fears take their terrible claim upon my soul, when I forget to be afraid of God. The one word, perhaps, for this generation, is this.....it is a people that's no longer afraid of God.

Why have we lost our fear of God? May I suggest several reasons? One could be this.....Christians don't read their Old Testament as well as they should. I can readily understand how you cling tenaciously to the New Testament, and well you should, for none of us can ever know too much about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ--and it would be a salutary thing, indeed, if we could memorize one page of the Gospel record after another; and it's an exceedingly fine thing, too, to become very, very familiar with the Acts of the Apostles--to know where Paul went and to know what Paul did where he went; and 'twould be a noble thing to be able to identify yourself with the Christians when the church was young---this is important.....but none of this should be done at the expense of the Old Testament. You cannot possibly appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ until you become familiar with the world as it was before He came. And you can never really appreciate the meaning of the Christian tradition, until you know what the world was like without it!

Christians should read their Old Testaments more than they do, and when they do, they will come face to face with the fact that in the Old Testament, God is always high and lifted up....a God always to

#### "The Fear of the Lord" (4)

be feared.....a God, always, who keeps a respectful distance between Himself and His people.....a God who never is dragged down. It's the Old Testament that keeps saying, again and again, "The fear of the Lord".....it is the Old Testament that introduces us to the words of the prophet who, when he saw the Lord, he saw the Lord alright, but it wasn't a God who, in a chummy fashion, puts His arm around his shoulder.....it was a God high and lifted up!....and when he saw Him, he said, "Woe is me! for I am unclean!".....this is one reason why we may not fear God as much as we should---because we fail to familiarize ourselves with the pages of the Old Testament, where God is always revealed as One high and lifted up.....crowned with awe and majesty!

In the Old Testament, God and creation exist in this way..... there are three parts to God's creation--the earth--the waters under the earth--and the sky above. And the Old Testament devotee of God was wise enough never to fully identify God with any one of these.... God was always something more than what He had done--over and above and beyond it.....so much so that when they referred to Him, He was in the Heaven above the heavens. And this they did for a purpose--because, among the people contemporary with the early Hebrews, God was always being dragged down.....there was the god of the fields...there was this god of that thing.....and God was always being brought down terribly close to earth....and their god was not held in awe.

There's another reason why we no longer hold God in fear and awe as well we should.....because we have suffered, at the hands of some of the songs that we've been singing, when we've talked about Jesus Christ and God. I can remember when I was greatly disturbed



when someone told me that "I Come To The Garden Alone" was not a good hymn!.....Ah! highly singable!....and didn't my feet fairly move when I sang it!....and didn't we move along in a very lilting fashion! ....what could be wrong with that?....it brought a most pleasant feeling to my soul---and I was a happy Christian! But I submit to you this morning, and I warn you now, you'll be quick to take exception, perchance, to what I'm about to share with you, but I would submit to you this morning.....the singing of certain kinds of hymns has rendered a marked disservice to our concept of God.....

"I come to the garden alone,  
While the dew is still on the roses;  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,  
The Son of God discloses.  
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own.  
And the joy we share as we gather there,  
None other has ever known."

.....Be careful with that, my friend. You're bringing God down to your own level!.....you're making God a kind of very gracious pal--in whose hand you easily slip yours.....and you walk ever so lightly in the cool of the morning. When you do this, you lose something of the transcendence that belongs to God. You do not treat Him with awe..... you've brought Him down to your own level!

In marked contrast, let me read for you now, what the old Hebrew did when he went to church....when he sang his hymns....this is the kind of thing that he did--you'll find it is Psalm 148--and notice how he ascribed to God this type of thing.....

"Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the  
heavens: praise him in the heights.  
Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all  
his hosts.  
Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye  
stars of light.

"The Fear of the Lord" (6)

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters  
that be above the heavens.  
Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded,  
and they were created.  
He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath  
made a decree which shall not pass.  
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and  
all deeps:  
Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind full-  
filling his word:  
Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all  
cedars:  
Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying  
fowl:  
Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all  
judges of the earth:  
Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children:  
Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name  
alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth  
and heaven....."

.....there's a marked contrast between that kind of praise, for a  
God who is above all gods---high and lifted up....who, when you think  
of Him, you have only one reaction---praise Him!.....as over against  
...."My God and I go in the field together....

We walk and talk, as good friends should and do.

We clasp our hand, our voices ring with laughter,

My God and I walk through the meadows hue."..... be careful  
with that, my friend. God is something more than just a good friend!  
.....God is something more than just a pal---don't you dare try to make  
God a buddy-buddy!

Why do I feel as strongly as I do?....for the simple reason---  
that when you sing a kind of song like this, you are just one generation  
away from the generation that refers to God as "the Man upstairs"....as,  
..."Somebody up there likes me".....parenthetically, my friend, nobody  
up there likes you!.....the One who's up there, loves you!.....and  
there's a world of difference between liking and loving!--especially  
when you think about God in that way! This is the contemptible thing

"The Fear of the Lord" (7)

about it, you see....we want a God who likes us, when we need a God who loves us.

And then, this is also the generation that has a Jane Russell who says, "When you come to know the Lord, He's a livin' doll".....  
...blasphemy! I say.....blasphemy! God is to be feared....and when we think this way, we make Him very chummy.....and when we think this way, we make Him a Great Pal, who will be very, very kind to us.....  
and that's why we react the way we do with sinning--why do we go on sinning the way we do, ever so easily, because we think God will wink at our sins..."I know you, my son--you're not perfect--I don't expect too much from you".....and because we've made for ourselves a God who doesn't expect too much from us, we haven't given Him too much, either.

He could be the symbol for our generation.....the thief who enters the room, about to commit an act of robbery.....with his flashlight, he goes round about the walls, until the ray of light falls upon a statue of Jesus Christ--a peculiar quirk--he cannot go on and commit the act of robbery, with Jesus Christ looking at him.....so he goes and turns the statue around, and Jesus Christ faces a blank wall.....  
.....this is the kind of thing we do with God!...."God, turn around this time--make as though you don't see it!".....this is what happens when you become chummy with God!

There is a third reason why we don't fear God as we should.....  
..we've lost our proper appreciation for history. The Old Testament, if it's anything, is a record of God's dealing with men, and how men have lived out their years, and what they've done, and how they pay the consequences, when they fail to subscribe to the eternal will and

wish of God. Ours is a generation that commits itself entirely too much to the horizontal---what is happening in this, our own day.....and because we forget to remember what happened years ago, when man flaunted his own will against the wish of God, we haven't nearly as much fear for God in the present moment.

There's a fourth reason why men don't fear God as much as they should.....because they fail to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is not wisdom---knowledge may be the tool for wisdom, but sometimes we're prone to equate it. If only we would know so much, then we would have a better world. And so we try to amass so much learning....scientifically....culturally....artistically.....even religiously!---to know so much about God!.....and yet, knowing so much about God is not the same as knowing God! We make much of the fact that we know so much scientifically---we may be able to know how, some day, to plant a man's feet upon the moon.....and yet we haven't enough wisdom by which some people can get along with the neighbor who lives next door--and he doesn't have to be a Negro, either!---to make it unusually difficult.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"....Martin Luther is perfectly right in his explanation of the Catechism, when he deals with the Ten Commandments. Again and again, he said...."We should so fear and love God...." John Henry Newman once said, that the surest safeguard against sin is to make sure that you're always shocked by it. I say to you this morning.....the surest guarantee to enjoy the love of God is to make certain that you hold Him in fear and awe.....the best kind of love is the love that always knows the integrity of a respectful distance. More than one parent has bowed his head, realiz-

"The Fear of the Lord" (9)

ing that his greatest disservice to his child has been in his inability to teach him the fear of the Lord.

If you've taken exception with this sermon, if you feel it's not been properly balanced, I simply ask you to remember, in closing, that the Gospel lesson for the day ends with these words: "That I say to you, that none of those bidden to my supper shall taste of my banquet."  
.....curs is a God who could reject us!

"GOD HAS NO FAVORITES"

The sermon is entitled, "God Has No Favorites," and the text from the Book of Deuteronomy, the 8th chapter, the 19th verse:

"And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish."

Will you please keep in mind very definitely for the next 18 or 20 minutes, that this sermon is being preached the day before July 4--a day of much significance to us as a nation. The People of Israel found it a very easy thing to permit themselves the luxury of the thought that they were God's favorites...that, of all the people on the face of the earth, God has particularly chosen them, and that there was a spot in His heart for them, as was not held by any other people.

Now they built for themselves a rather sizeable list of arguments, by which they could go on entertaining this thought.....

....after all, God had chosen them.....

....after all, God had supplied them with leadership, the like of which He did not give to other people.....

....after all, God had given to them the Ten Commandments....

....after all, God did call them out of the land of Egypt, and for four decades, He was very, very patient with them-- instead of washing His hands of them and having done with them, every time they irritated Him, He kept coming back and presumably, giving them one chance after another.....

They had their reasons for permitting themselves to think that they

were God's favorites. And as very definite proof, forty years had come and gone, and even though they had agonized the mind and the heart of God, God still said to them....."You can still have the Promised Land, and I have brought you this day to its very edge!"

Now there was a great moment in the history of the Children of Israel when, prior to entering the Promised Land, God asked their battle-scarred leader, Moses, to bring them together in a great assembly. And when they came together, God, through their leader, reviewed for them what had happened during these forty years. It was enough to exalt the pride of any people, when this man, Moses by name, stood up and recited for them the exceedingly wonderful things that had happened in these forty years, which clearly revealed the hand of God.

And then, as though that were not enough, Moses said, "I want to predict the future....If you think this past has clearly revealed the hand of God, behold, now, when I unfold for you the things to come!.....

....why, we're going to go in and establish ourselves in a promised land.....

....we are going to pluck fruit from trees that we did not plant!.....

....we are going to draw water from wells that we did not dig!..

....we are going to establish ourselves in cities that we ourselves did not establish--and God is going to give us title!.....

God is going to give us these things!---this is how wonderful our God is.....to us."

They had their reasons for believing that they were God's favorites.....until, all of a sudden, this battle-scarred leader, this veteran of forty years, draws them up short, and he tells them in the course of his discourse, the word that constitutes the text for this sermon....."If you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish." Now what will you do with this favorite clause of yours? Now what will you do with the notion that, of all the people on the face of the earth, God will always wink His eye at you? God has no favorites....and this text spells, once and forever, the lie to any such notion.

On this, the day before the Fourth of July, let us deal very earnestly, now, with the deductions which are self-evident in this text:

Deduction #1: God acts in history. Moses was just telling these people about their history....."Look what's happened, these forty years, to us, through us, for us and by us!"....and Moses said, ..."But can't you see that even in our history, this has been something written by the finger of God!".....whatever happens on the pages of time, simply doesn't happen casually or accidentally---it is the moving finger of God that is at work, and God is aware of everything that happens, and God, in the end, will bring all that happens to His liking....and all that ever occurs, is subject to His judgment.

Some people, very foolishly, have the notion that God is somewhere out there--removed from His world! When I was a student in college, they acquainted us with the philosophy that prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century. It dealt with a kind of a god for



which they had the Latin phrase "deus ex machina"---a god outside the thing that he had made....and they used to describe it for us in this way---that God, in His relationship to His world, was like a watchmaker in his relationship to his watch. The watchmaker made the watch and made it perfectly and wound it up, and then he put it on the shelf--and he was proud of what he had done.....and then he walked away, and divorced himself from the thing that he had made. There are some people who have said that God is like that--God, the Creator, made His world--God put it in motion....and then God walked away from it....and God has nothing to do, whatsoever, with what happens in His world.

The Children of Israel knew different. They had decade after decade and year after year by which, now, they could look back and see that these things had happened, and God was fully aware of everything that had occurred---to them, by them, through them and for them. That's deduction #1---God does act, and God acts in history. There's always the historical perspective to that which is divine.

The second deduction is this: This God whom we worship is the Sovereign Lord of all people and of all nations....He is over all that He has made. Sometimes we labor the thought that God is not the God of all people. Do you dare me to spell it out for you uncomfortably?

....Sometimes there are people who Americanize heaven.....

....Sometimes there are people who paint the fact of God--white.

....Sometimes there are people who say that there is only one

set, economic order upon which God will smile favorably--and

that only the people who believe in the capitalistic system

and the system of free enterprise as we know it and as we practice it....shall deserve God's blessing.

The God who acts in history is the God who is the Sovereign Lord above all nations and above all people, and He has no one set pattern which is more pleasing to Him, designed by man.

Deduction #3: The God who acts in history and the God who is the Sovereign Lord of all people....is a God who holds nations, as well as individuals, responsible. God said to the Children of Israel, ...."I say to you, as a people.....if you do not worship me, you shall surely perish".....then He had to remind them--and you can read it for yourself in the Book of Deuteronomy, if you want some required reading for the summer season--don't scatter your shot--concentrate on the Book of Deuteronomy for a period of time.....God reminds those people of the Children of Israel--he said...."You thought that when you went into the land and conquered the people, that you were able to conquer them because you were the righteous ones!---not necessarily so!" Says God....."These other people were conquered because they were more wicked than you!....and they failed underneath the weight of their wickedness. As I held them responsible", so God says, "I'm going to hold you responsible. Even though I have given you the Ten Commandments"....rather, He could have said, "because I have--over and above--you shall be more responsible than they."

God is saying that to America right now. "I'm holding you responsible".....and then we say to ourselves.....

....how can God hold a nation responsible?

....how can you indict a whole order of society?

....how can you condemn man collectively?

This is not easy, and this is a difficult thought....."How may I, as one person, assume the guilt and responsibility of error in judgment, and perhaps downright dishonesty in certain phases of legislation, that could become a rule of thumb for my nation?"....this is not easy to say, but the biblical view of history, and the biblical understanding that we have of God is simply this:....that God does hold nations responsible.....and God will bring a time of judgment against them, even as He brings it against an individual.

One of the most courageous things that I have seen in my limited lifetime was to read a statement prepared by certain courageous Christian leaders in Germany who, after World Waré II, identified themselves, without reservation, with the guilt of Adolph Hitler---who were willing to say that, even when they were silent, when they might have spoken out against all for which he stood, this, in itself, was condemnation against them.

What does one do, then, when he stands in fear of the judgment that can be placed against his nation? He must remember that nations are made up of people.....and a man, as an individual, must recognize the truth that God knows how he takes his part in society....and, as an individual, he contributes to the sum total of the whole....and so, therefore, God will hold me responsible for what is the part of collective man. When one reads Bible history, one is forced to recognize the fact that God was dependent, ever so often, upon the remnant--a group of people who became the conscience for the nation--and God began to work through them, and by them. Maybe that's the point at which we must level our thought.....am I classified among the remnant who constitute the conscience for my nation?....do I, as an individual, take to heart, seriously, what happens for good or for ill in my nation?

When Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee, there were those in Britain who must have thought, "This is an excellent opportunity to parade before all the peoples of the world, the might, the power and the majesty, which is Britain." And so they had their Golden Jubilee, and from all parts of the world, they paraded their might and their majesty. In keeping with the occasion, someone said, "We should commission someone to write a poem---this is as illustrious as all that!".....and you know what they did--they asked the distinguished Rudyard Kipling to formulate the thought of the people--what a shock they must have had, when they read what he had written. Rather than glorify the might and the power and majesty of Britain, he took her to task, and even though you've memorized the words, would you be kind enough to let me read them for you again?....and as I read these words, bring to mind before you, the Queen of all the nations, for so she was in that day, with all the pomp and circumstance.....and then it's one man, who echoes the spirit of the text of this sermon:

Recessional

God of our fathers, known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,  
Beneath whose awful hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine---  
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget --- lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The captains and the kings depart:  
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget --- lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
On dune and headland sinks the fire;  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget --- lest we forget!

~~If, drunk with sight~~

"God Has No Favorites" (8)

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose  
Wild tongues that have not thee in awe,  
Such boasting as the gentiles use,  
Or lesser breeds without the law---  
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget --- lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust  
In reeking tube and iron shard,  
All valiant dust that builds on dust,  
And guarding calls not thee to guard,  
For frantic boast and foolish word---  
Thy mercy on thy people, Lord!

Rudyard Kipling

"And if you forget the Lord your God and go after  
other gods and serve them and worship them, I  
solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely  
perish."

I beg you, my friend, you're not having, now, the mistaken  
notion that what I've told you is my word for it? This is the Word  
of God!.....and none of us dare believe that He's changed His  
mind!

"TO SEE THE GLORY OF THE LORD"

The sermon this morning is entitled, "To See The Glory of the Lord" and the text is the 7th verse of the 16th chapter of the Book of Exodus:

"And in the morning, ye shall see the glory  
of the Lord...."

There are some precious passages in the Scriptures, even as this text, which lend themselves very nicely to an interpretation over and beyond the immediate historical situation. While it is true that there are some texts that you can never divorce from their immediate moment, every now and then you come across a text such as this, that has certain poetic quality, which will permit you to think about it far beyond its actual setting....."and in the morning, ye shall see the glory of the Lord....."

Suppose, for the moment, we refer to it with a reference such as this----  
--that in the morning hours of each day, the glory of the Lord seems exceedingly fresh.....in the morning hours of each day, the glory of the Lord seems exceedingly fresh.....

I do not adhere very easily to the school of thought that maintains that the sunset hours are always times of peace and tranquility. For some of us, the sunset time of the day does not bring the desired peace that we would cherish. For once we are a part of the very busy activity of the day, even the first quiet moments that we may have become an opportunity by which the burdens of the day seem to become intensified and, when left alone, we begin to think how grievous the cares of the day actually are.....and for some of us, we may find sleep late in coming, simply because, once we've turned our back upon the press of the day, the burden of the day remains and one doesn't set it aside as easily as he puts his jacket

upon the hanger and puts it into the closet when he comes home.

But then, there is always the miracle of sleep, and when sleep does come, God brings His own peace.....And for some of us, the waking moment of each day is the glorious privilege of seeing, at God's outstretched hand, a fresh, new opportunity.....and if we did not have peace at eventide, we most certainly would call this peace--the quiet of the day's dawn. If you are the kind of person who, by discipline or other reasons, will make it a point to get up several hours before the day's work actually begins.....if you are the kind of person who allows himself certain unhurried moments....you know what it is to be made aware of God's glory in the morning--the kind of glory which is not matched by any other hour of the day.

Suppose you would be numbered among those who've been awake, now, for at least five hours--no, not five--that's too much, and especially on a Sunday morning.. ....but say three, say two----and maybe at six or seven o'clock this morning, you walked about ever so quietly.....

.....perhaps you do have a patio.....

.....perhaps you do have some patch of green.....

.....perhaps there was some tree under which you could walk.....

.....perhaps you did hear the chorus of the birds this morning.....

God's glory in the morning!.....there isn't anything quite like it!

That's why, so easily, I ask you to consider the text this morning, with an understanding that in the morning of each new day, you can be made aware of God's glory. I said to the congregation that met at 8:30--that there are some people who choose that hour, sometimes because they want to come as a family, and then to share fully in the Christian Education that takes place at 9:30.....but there are some people who come faithfully to the 8:30 hour because--even at that time, there is something of the quiet that may not prevail--that a kind of feverish pace sets in so easily, once 9:30 has come....."In the morning, ye shall see the glory of the Lord....." One of the parishioners present at the 8:30 hour said that even

driving through Sligo Creek Parkway, on her way to the first service in God's house, brings a benediction all of its own. I do not need press the point....in the morning of each day, there is the glory of the Lord.

But there's another application that should be made of that text--very specifically today.....in the morning years of our life, we can see the glory of the Lord. It must be for those who reach the age of maturity and wisdom, to be able to walk about in the spirit of tranquility and to be made aware always of the Presence of God...but in the morning years of our lives, when the glory first dawns, when we are first confronted by the fact that GOD IS--and we bring to Him the fervency of a believing heart.....this is a precious thing. The older we become--alas and alack!--we become hardened and calloused. It is not always easy to believe, the older we become. We deal constantly with what might be referred to as 'man's inhumanity to man,' and older years can become years of disillusionment. It is not any easy thing to grow old, either gracefully or graciously, because of the kind of world in which we do live.....but in the morning years of our life, when all is bright and wonderful, to be able to see the glory of the Lord then and there----this is something!

We in Saint Luke Church charge ourselves with the responsibility to make certain that the young people of this parish, in the morning years of their life, do not fail to see the glory of the Lord. And we who are members of the staff of this congregation take it upon ourselves as a sacred obligation to help them so interpret the glory of the Lord in the days of their youth, that they will not be easily lost...

.....When Mr. Granner is conducting a choir rehearsal, he is given to understand, and so he shares it with those who are in the choir rehearsal room that he is not simply teaching people how to sing--not simply preparing people for something that they're going to render at a service on a Sunday morning.....but he takes it upon himself to interpret the choir rehearsal room as something as sacred, in its own way, as the thing that takes place in the choir loft.....As a member of the church staff, he is charged to share with those in this parish who in the morning years of



their life come to him, that he should enable them to see the glory of the Lord.....

.....This Parish Deaconess of ours, as she is given the opportunity to work with those who are young, and as some of us have observed her---who can ever question the fact that as she is among them, she counts it her only obligation to God, in this parish, to help those who are young--as she teaches them, as she discharges other duties---to become acquainted with the glory of the Lord.

.....When our Director of Christian Education seeks to recruit a Sunday School teacher--sits down to plan a Sunday School session for a quarter---those of us who know her readily understand that she, too, takes it upon herself to see that those who are young, coming under her direction, are made acquainted with the fact of God.....that in these impressionable years of their lives, they should understand what it is to be referred to as "the glory of the Lord."

It is not easy to do this, my friend.....ours is an age with the accent upon the scientific--and unless the scientist schools himself, he always runs the risk of losing something of the wonder and the glory of God. And those who are young, in this, our day, with all the emphasis upon what man is able to do--even though there be a wonder about it, it is man who creates the push-button--it is man who pushes the button. Do you know how someone has expressed this very thought? ---indicating the fact that even in this day and age, young people themselves, looking up at the stars, can miss something of the wonder that we once knew in our day?.....

"Twinkle, twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are....."

But now another has said --

"Twinkle, twinkle, giant star,  
I know exactly what you are,  
An incandescent ball of gas,  
Condensing to a solid mass.

Twinkle, twinkle, giant star  
I need not wonder what you are,  
For seen by spectroscopic ken,  
You're helium and hydrogen."

Sad indeed is the young person who may grow up against a world such as that! It is our business to write GOD into the vocabulary of those who are young. It is our business to enable them to see something for which they had no other name except this---the glory of the Lord!

Let me speak to you quite personally this morning.....I could never have given my life to the Lord if, in the morning years of my life, I had not met certain people who introduced me, in no uncertain way, to the glory of the Lord. Sitting in the shadows of Camp Nawakwa, memories come back so easily.....Harvey Daniel Hoover.....the Reverend John Bishop---I could name others.....who, when they touched my life, they introduced me to the glory of the Lord--in the impressionable days of my youth.

Here in this parish, with more than three hundred of confirmation and post-confirmation age, we have an obligation, under God, that we dare not shirk.....and Kermit Finstad--Mr. Finstad--becomes the conscience for all of us....to make certain that all the rest of us see that those who are young are introduced to the glory of the Lord. You can never go back and reclaim it--what you don't give a youngster at 14, you cannot give him at 18, and expect it to be the same as at 14.

Did it ever occur to you, my friend, that any movement that has ever amounted for anything in the history of the world, has been basically and essentially a youth movement? The minds and the souls and the spirits of those who were young were first claimed, and whatever success that was guaranteed it, was guaranteed it because the minds and the spirits of those who were young were enamored by it..... You can have reason to believe, good one, that Christianity itself, at the very beginning, was a youth movement. Legend has a way of telling us that the early disciples could have been men who were numbered between the ages of 18 to 30.

Tomorrow is always first given to those who are young. The thing that causes this one man's soul an uncomfortable degree of anxiety is that what happened in Japan,

"To See The Glory of the Lord" (6)

not so long ago, was the expression of a student generation. I am not here to argue the merit or demerit of their rioting; but I simply know that it was the clamoring of a generation that doesn't know God!

.....When I think of China today, I remember how China was claiming the student generation when I was on a college campus.....

.....When I think of the bravado of Nikita Khrushchev, I think of what I saw 13 years ago in Prague, when 30 thousand young people, without any reservation whatsoever, were being claimed in the first World Federation of Youth that was being held.....

.....Any movement that has made a lasting impression for good has had its success guaranteed, to a very large measure, because of the way it claimed its youth.

Saint Luke Church has no right to claim her youth, simply to give them a glorified kind of baby-sitting in later adolescence. Whatever we do, we must do for them because, under God, we must make God a definite reality in their lives. To that end, this parish re-dedicates itself today. No one man will do it by himself. If, in his coming, he should serve this purpose--that he should open our eyes to our responsibility--then even his coming in this respect has served a noble purpose. Fortunate indeed is anyone among you who knows, at this very hour, a profound measure of peace and satisfaction, because he can remember that it was in the days of his youth that he knew what it was to be exposed to the fact of God.

TWO SONS HAD A FATHER

The sermon is entitled, "Two Sons Had A Father." It is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, and the text is the 11th verse of the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he said unto them, A certain man  
had two sons...."

These words strike a very pleasant note to the heart of any man who knows his Bible at all, because it brings back a good memory of what can be referred to as perhaps the most wonderful chapter in the entire Gospel according to Luke. It's that 15th chapter in which Jesus is directing His words against certain people, pressing home one point in three different ways. Would you like to know who the people were?--to whom He was speaking very personally? They were, I think, in truth, some people who had annoyed Jesus....they had irritated Him quite a bit....they were a group of people who had gone around talking among themselves, and pointing a finger at Jesus Christ, and condemning Him for some good thing that He was doing.

They said, "He calls Himself a good man---but did you ever notice how much time He spends with bad people?----why, people with whom we would never associate.....and wherever you look, you see them flocking around Jesus-- --and He's giving them some recognition.....".....and while they didn't have our word for it, surely they must have said something that meant the same thing....."birds of a feather----flock together".....

.....So they were branding Jesus Christ.....and Jesus knew all about it---taking Him to task because He was trying to be a friend to sinners.

So one day He preached a sermon--with them in mind--and He had three illustrations in His sermon, saying the same thing three different ways, but always trying to stress the same point. You remember it quite well, don't you?

He began, first of all, by telling them about a man who was a shepherd....and the shepherd had one hundred sheep....and he lost one of them...and He said this shepherd would have no peace until he found the one that was lost. ....now He remembered the progression in His sermon.....

Illustration #1: a shepherd.....one hundred sheep.....one lost.

Illustration #2: a woman who had ten precious coins....and out of the ten, she lost one.....

and then He said.....There was a man who had two sons".....and would you dare me to put it the way it has to be put?---he lost both of them, because both of them proved ~~themselves~~ disappointing to their father.

I know there's always the temptation to make yourself believe that one of these boys was good and the other bad. And there's always the risk that you and I run of putting a halo on one at the expense of the other...or of throwing stones at the one at the expense of the other. But in the final analysis, I submit to you this morning that this man who had two sons found both of them disappointing--neither one was perfect and neither one measured up to all that a son could have been.

If you're ever inclined to think that this is the parable of the Prodigal Son, you are mistaken; and if your caption for this parable is the parable of the Unforgiving Brother, you do not do justice to this passage of Scripture. The main character in this parable is neither one of the boys. The hero--the main character--is the father. That's why, with deliberation, I have titled the sermon, "Two Sons Had A Father".....the emphasis belongs upon the father....and whatever happens in this story concerning the two sons is simply material that is used in order to better illustrate the basic, the wonderful character--of the father.

Look for a moment, if you don't mind---let's look at the photograph in the album. Let's look at the two boys, keeping in mind always that they served a useful purpose, in order to enhance the basic character.....

.....The younger of the two sons came to his father, as he had a right to do, and he said.....

"Father, I'm sick and tired of these hills....Father, I'm restless--I'm adventurous.....I just can't stay here any longer. Give me what belongs to me...."

According to good Jewish custom, the father would always divide his inheritance between his sons---they knew almost exactly what they were going to get. And so, instead of waiting it out, this restless son wants settlement right now. He takes the money and he goes into the far country, and then---I think I'll have to tell it to you--name any sin in the book...he did it. That's what happened to him in the far country.

And when sin had done its terrible work, when he was completely debased, he did come to himself.....and whatever it was that drove him back home, he did come home....and he had made up his mind that when he did come home, he was willing to come home and accept the consequences. Now you can begin to reahh for the halo for this boy if you want to. Well, that's the one son.

On the other hand, there was the first-born, if you please--the Scriptures keep him in his rightful place.....these are not wasted words when they say he was in the field--that means he stayed home and tended the store.....he kept himself to the daily monotonous chores--he did not run away. Now you can get a halo for him, if you want to.....

Now, one day the son comes back, and when he comes back, the father receives him--embraces him--offers him a celebration. The son in the fields returns to hear this thing that is taking place.....he asks what it means--he becomes infuriated.....

"It isn't fair!.....Father!.....What do you mean by this!--look at him!".....

How could the father really look at him? The blush of youth had gone from his cheeks....was there anything there that resembled his son?

....."Look at him, father!....You're treating him as a friend....All the while I stayed here--you never made merry for me!....It isn't fair!"

Do you still want to keep that halo on him? Maybe his hands aren't as dirty as his brother's, but how about his heart? His heart is filled with hatred and his heart isn't nearly big enough to take in the wastrel.

Well, you can build a case and, playing this old game of yours and mine of saints and sinners--you can build a case for either one..... but, my friends, this is not the story of two sons---it's the story of one father--the father of both of them, and in whose eyes both of them were a disappointment. The one went off and turned his back upon his father..... the one stayed at home and was never really his father's son. The barrier between the father's heart for both of them was pretty much the same on the part of either one.

Well, you can't call this a parable of the Prodigal Son and you can't call it the parable of the Unforgiving Brother---it's the parable of The Loving Father.....and Jesus was telling it to men who were making much of the fact that He was associating with sinners.

He said, "All right, you say that I associate with sinners...let me tell you something---not about sinners....that's why you use the labels that you do, and that's why you gather your skirts and you separate yourself from these people, and you take me to task because I associate with them---let me tell you something--not about sinners--not about wayward sons.....let me tell you something about the loving heart of God!.....let me tell you about the father of two sons.....focus your eye upon him".....

And that's precisely what Jesus Christ wanted them to do.....he wanted to give them an unforgettable picture of the very nature of God.

Do you know what I do sometimes? Whenever I witness a dramatic production, I go away saying to myself, "Well now, had I been the author of the plot, what could have been the other possibilities that I might have considered?"

....or when I read a book, sometimes I say to myself, "How else could it have ended?" Sometimes there are people who do that with this parable. What are the "might-have-beens" that could have been part of this parable?

Here's a "might-have-been".....

.....It might have been that the son who went off into the far country could have so wasted his life, living riotously, that he would never have come to his senses. In the years that God has given me, I met one person, one time, of whom I had to feel in my heart that that person had fallen so low--that that person had built, against the very love of God, a kind of immunity... ....suppose that could have happened to this wayward son?---that he would never have come to himself?.....perhaps he might have lived out there in the far country and died---ere he would have come to himself! Suppose he would never have known the joy that comes to repenters!.....this might have been!....

.....This, too, might have been.....Suppose the first-born--suppose the elder son would have gone to his father and said....."Father, I cannot stand any longer living with you in anguish.....for your sake, if not for the fact of my brother, I will go and I will look for him.....I promise you I will return." Suppose the elder son, the first-born, would have taken on a role like that?.....Suppose.....

.....This, too, might have been.....Suppose, when the prodigal returned, his father could have already died?.....suppose he could never have made up to him?.....suppose he could never have said, "Father, I have sinned against you, and whatever strength there is in my remaining years, I will make it up to you---I swear by the name of God!".....suppose he could never have talked that way?

.....On the other hand, suppose the elder son--suppose he would have come to himself and would have said...."Look at all these things I've been sharing.....I have no memories to haunt me--my remaining days will



not be dogged by wickedness that has already run its course.....thank God I won't have to remember what he has to remember!".....and suppose the elder brother would have said to him, his first night home...."Brother, let me sleep with you tonight....and when you toss restlessly in your bed, remembering the sins of your youth, I will calm you as best I can, and I will give you the assurance that belongs to you when you sleep under your father's roof.".....  
.....suppose.....suppose this is the way it might have ended!

But when I play this game of "might-have-been" with this parable, there's one character I will not touch.....for if I know the mind of Jesus aright, He had no alternative father. As far as the father is concerned, He could not possibly picture the father as rejecting the son. He's talking about the love of God.....and He's using this father to represent it.....there is no "might-have-been" for the father. Jesus says, "This is the way the father is---he remains constant...his love is unchanging.....and God is like that!"

My friend, this is the kind of father that you and I have and the two sons represent all of us. The 'two sons' is a figure of speech for you and for me.....and every single one of us is disappointing to our Heavenly Father in one way or another.....but the Father remains constant. His love is unchanged and his arms are always outstretched. Since this is the kind of God we have, it should not be difficult for us to learn the kind of children we ought to become.

"THE KING WHO CRIED"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, is entitled, "The King Who Cried;" and the text is the 41st verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it."

Jesus was on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem, and as any traveler who visits the Holy Land will tell you, when you make such a journey, you come to the crest of the hill and suddenly, as you turn, - - there, in front of you, is Jerusalem.....and as He saw it, Jesus began to cry.

When I was a youngster reading my Bible, I could never quite understand this passage of Scripture.....Jesus in tears? Didn't I believe that He was always the Perfect Personality?.....possessing complete poise.....never caught off-guard.....always having His emotions under control? Just as He was not given to undue anger, so I believed that He would never find Himself at the point where there would be tears in His eye. I could never quite appreciate Jesus---in tears. But when one reads the Bible, it isn't his prerogative to paint the pictures of Jesus Christ the way you think they are or should be. One must read the Scriptures and take it just as he finds it.....and one, therefore, is confronted by this picture of Jesus Christ.....cry He did.

Now I ask myself the next question--the only question that has to be asked.....why did He cry? What was it that moved Jesus Christ to tears? Now, we know, don't we, that people cry for different reasons.....

.....some people cry because they are happy---they are glad.....

.....some people cry when they are lonely.....

.....some people cry when they are afraid.....

.....some people cry--when they are sad.....made sad because of something that either has happened, or something that they know is going to happen.....

"The King Who Cried" (2)

.....Jesus Christ is crying because He saw what was going to happen.

Now, it's one thing to cry because something either has happened or is going to happen.....it's another thing to cry because you may know that it doesn't have to happen that way.....and that, my friend, is exactly why Jesus Christ is crying. With the prophetic insight that He had, He pictured impending doom, and He could not hold back the tears because He knew that it did not have to happen that way!

Now this is what He foresaw.....He told them that the day was going to come when this wonderful, wonderful city of Jerusalem would be destroyed--it would be leveled to the ground...and you would not find even so much as one stone against another! This was the impending doom!

Did you ever see a city that was destroyed? This is the difficulty that most of us have when we read Scripture. Out of our own experience, sometimes, we can't appreciate what Jesus is talking about. This passage means ever so much more to me now, ever since I walked amid the ruins of that great city in Europe that refused to die---Warsaw. Not too long after the war, I found myself there. They told me that 90% of the city of Warsaw had been destroyed. Unforgettable... ..was the time I went walking in one section of the city where it seemed acre after acre was nothing but leveled debris.....and I tell you, if I remember correctly, that I defy anyone to have found--so great was the destruction--as much as three--four--five bricks still hung together as a cluster by mortar, that remained intact----so complete was the destruction!

It was on a Sunday afternoon, I think, without consulting my diary that I kept at that time--it was August 17--when I went so quietly in the calm of a Sabbath day to visit a hillside not far from Prague....the little village of what once had been Lidice. The occupying authorities had sworn revenge against the thing that some Prague people had done against Heydrich the Hangman, the Commandant of the occupying authorities. They traced the culprits to the little village

of Lidice. Heydrich said, "Lidice shall be obliterated from the face of the earth."

.....They came by night.....they took the men and the boys, lined them up against the wall of the largest barn in the village--killed them--buried them in a mass grave....they took the women and the children and carried them off to camp.....then they went back---looted every house--then they burned the houses to the ground.....then they brought in horses and plows and turned the debris underneath the sod--and planted a corn field.....a city, a village---wiped off the face of the earth!

Jesus, from His vantage-point, looks down upon Jerusalem.....four decades from the very day when He was speaking, you could have taken a horse and a plow and made a furrow---right down what had once been the center of the Holy City of Jerusalem! Jesus, realizing all this, is moved to tears....the King Who Cries.... not simply because it's going to happen, but because He knows in His heart that it did not have to happen that way!

We are not fair with the Scriptures, beloved, when we read the Scriptures and say to ourselves..."That's the way it was planned....that's the way it was going to happen!"---as though Jesus were an actor upon the stage and, in the master-mind of the Author, everything had been planned ahead of time and nothing that we who watch the spectacle can do about it will change it in any way. Authors may write the script, and the characters may have to fulfill what is outlined as the role of the character, and the script, maybe, may not be altered.....but Jesus is not an actor that looms upon the stage. Jesus is a participant in history, and history is made up of people who live at a certain time, in a certain place, and people are individuals who can make up their minds to do something or not do something.

Jesus Christ knew that it did not have to happen the way it was going to happen. The ~~man~~ and women who lived in Jerusalem could have written a different ending to the story.....but with the insight that He had of human nature, sensing the impending doom, He could do nothing else but cry. Again I say to you, repeat-

ing it ever so often---not because of what happened or was going to happen....  
...but because He knew that it did not have to happen that way!

This shouldn't be too difficult for you to understand, unfortunately....

.....you haven't lost any sleep, have you?....about what might happen  
forty years from now?.....

.....you're not unduly disturbed, are you?....about the handwriting  
that you could read, concerning the future---one hundred years from now?.....

...it's enough, you say, to pay our taxes right now....it's enough to get  
on with the business of today's living.....and because life has its  
own way of putting pressure upon us, we'll take the pleasure that's closest at  
hand and we just won't allow ourselves to worry about impending doom.

There are about three or four deductions that ought to be made from this  
Gospel lesson. One is that it's not a shameful thing to cry. It's not a shameful  
thing to be moved to tears about impending doom. I take off my hat to Sir Edward  
Gray--wasn't he the Londoner who, on the eve of World War I, looked out over Europe  
and exclaimed...."The lights of Europe are going out, one by one, and I do not  
think that, in my day, I shall see them burn again!" I wouldn't give much for any  
man who, in some great moment of life and with insight, would not find his soul  
sensitive enough to be moved to tears--concerning an impending doom.

The second deduction is this: this actually happened! Jesus did cry! He  
is the Weeping King....you can picture Him with the tears streaking down His  
cheek--not for Himself, but for other people. But you dare not keep Jesus Christ  
on this hill over-looking Jerusalem, forever with tears in His eyes. One also  
reads in the Scripture that He moved away from that hill-top...the tears were  
wiped away....and He went down into the city of Jerusalem, and there He stayed---  
in the very midst of the city, with this impending doom over it. It is one thing  
to cry--to be concerned about impending doom....but one dare not stay there with  
tears in his eyes! Jesus Christ wiped them away and He went down into the city  
and He cast His lot with the city, and He went on proclaiming something of the

love of God and something of the truth of God, hoping against hope, perhaps, that, here and there, there might be someone who would still hear.

This is the lamentable thing about some of us....that we might be moved to tears and we want to go on keeping that handkerchief in our hand, and we can't. Jesus could have gathered His skirts about Him and He could have said to Himself....  
.."Well, I've given almost three years of my life, preaching to people....I've taught....I've done everything I could to show them the way....if they're bent on hell, I'm sick and tired of trying to stop them, and I shall assume no more obligation--no more responsibility!" Sometimes you and I are prone to react that way--and to run away and let the rest of the world go its wicked course.....not so Jesus Christ! Moved to tears, He wipes them away, goes down...and spends that most eventful week in Jerusalem.

The other deduction is this: How, in heaven's name, could He do it?....  
Ah! That's the answer, isn't it? It was in heaven's name that He did it. He was able to go down and hold the torch high in the face of impending doom because He saw beyond the destruction of a city! Man might have the moment of history before him, but God keeps Eternity in the hollow of His hand.....and Jesus Christ believed that, even though a city might be destroyed, there was something to be shared in the hearts and souls of men, concerning truth and love, that no fire-brand could ever destroy.....and that's exactly what He did!

And you and I share the benefits of the Gospel today because Jesus Christ..  
...wiped the tears away from His eyes and went down and walked with a certain number of people and He made friends with them.....and He pointed their finger in the direction of God--and who knows?--when, in succeeding years, they remembered the destruction of their city, there were some who said, that over and above the ruin, is God!

This sermon stops at this point---stops at this point, only to give you the invitation to finish the sermon for yourself....and to write for yourself the answer to these questions.....

.....have I ever allowed my soul to be sensitive enough to impending

doom, that I would be worried about it?.....

.....and have I ever permitted myself to reach the place where, having been concerned about wickedness, I was willing to go into the very shadow of it and raise the standard of God, in one way or another?.....

August 28, 1960

"THE DIFFERENCE"

= No Halo  
In His  
Hand

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, bears the title, "The Difference," and the text is a portion of the 10th verse of the 18th chapter of Luke:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray;"

Who was it who, instead of saying, "No matter where you go, people are all alike--people are people, the world over," said, rather profoundly, "There may not be much difference between one individual as over against another, but what difference there is can be of tremendous significance!" We have reason to believe that Jesus Christ subscribed to this philosophy...and the parable, spoken as the Gospel lesson for the day, is proof positive of this very thing; for in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Jesus is drawing, with deliberation, a very rigid line between two people.

This is the parable of the difference. In fact, you've been made so much aware of the difference between the Pharisee and the publican that already you could be quite impervious to anything else that might be said about them--they are two entirely different people, and you say, "I get the point that Jesus was trying to make".....but do you really, my friend?

There have been those who have read the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican who, remembering how the one said, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are," have pondered the teaching of Jesus Christ and, themselves, gone away saying, "and I, too, thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are".....thinking they had gotten the point, they had missed it completely... ..and, lest that should happen to you and to me, why don't we take careful attention of the kind of thing that Helmut Theileke has done so well when he treats this parable in his significant book called, "THE WAITING FATHER." Somewhere, as I remember it now, he talks about the similarities between these two men---ah! he doesn't call them similarities--he calls them parallels;



and, perchance, in order to better appreciate the difference between these two men, we can well afford to take heed of the similarity or the parallel.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray".....the opening words of Jesus Christ allow us to see at once that they were men going to a certain place for a certain purpose.....praying men--temple bound.....and when they went, each one had this in common--that he must have believed that he should be found inside the courts of the Lord....that he had an appointment with God, within the walls of the church!

Now you know very well that there are some people who will tell you that they can meet God anywhere, and it doesn't make much difference where they meet Him. But, from time immemorial, it seems as though God's preferred place of meeting men has been within the walls of a sacred place, and He seems to smile with favor upon those who---let me say it for you now--you've heard it before....'mark the path that leads to a place of prayer'. Now, to the everlasting credit of both of these men, they had this thing in common---they were both temple bound.....and neither one permitted himself to think that he didn't have to go, or he should not go.

As an example, remembering the parable so well as you do, the Pharisee did not say to himself, "I am good enough---I don't have to go to church!" .....he did not say, as some people have been known to say.....

....."I know as much as the next fellow---why, I can teach a Sunday School class better than the fellow who teaches my class--I don't have to go!...

....."I don't have to go to church---why, with what little I know about music, I can sing even better than some of those people who sing in the choir!--I'm as good as they".....

and I can understand how someone could talk like this.....

....."and I'm as good a student of the Scriptures as the preacher--and I'm not so sure that I'm going to trust his line of reasoning when he deals with the Scriptures--I think my understanding and my interpretation of the Bible is even superior to his---I'm as good as any of them...I don't have to go to church....."

I remember, unpleasantly of course, how hurt my home pastor was, in that village of some 3,000 people or less.....the teacher of English in the local high school was supposed to have said that she just couldn't stand going to church and to see the way the preacher treated the English language .....she knew it better than he! .....Now, there are some people who do not go to church because they have no need, and the need that they have cannot be satisfied adequately when they go. To the credit of these men, neither one spoke like that. The Pharisee, good as he thought himself to be, did not say that he was too good to go.

On the other hand, haven't we all met people who say....."I'm not good enough to go to church.....I can't dress as well as those people do.... ...why, Pastor, 60% of your people or higher have had college education--and I never finished eighth grade.....I'm not good enough to be found inside your church!".....To the credit of the publican, poor as he thought himself to be, he did not isolate himself from the precincts of the courts of the Lord. Both of these men stand on common ground--this is a similarity that characterizes both of them.....they felt the need to mark the path that leads to a house of prayer.

They also had this in common.....that when they got there, they ran the risk of exposing themselves to the searching ray of God's truth. Some of us earnestly believe that there is a kind of confrontation that comes from being with people inside the courts of the Lord when one man, the preacher as an example, stands up, and tells you in no uncertain way what it is that he knows that God has put upon his heart to tell you!.....and if there's any justification for the preacher at all, it may be found on that score. Now, when you go to church, you run the risk of having this happen--of exposing yourself to the truth of God. These men had this thing in common.

There is also this similarity.....that when they came to pray, and exposed themselves to the truth and the love of God, they caught something of a reflection of themselves.....and each one knew what he was....and each one

called it by name. You heard me tell you before that prayer is like the candid camera for a soul.....if it is at all possible to creep up upon a man when he's on his knees, if you really want to know what a man is like down deep under---it comes to light when he talks with God.....and this candid camera called prayer---"two men went up into the temple to pray"---brings both of these men into clear and sharp focus, and it is precisely at this point that the difference comes out.....the same church.....the same motivation.....the same God.....but the men are different. Now, what is the difference?

There may not be very much difference between one individual and another, but what difference there is may be of tremendous significance. Jesus believed this.....and He went looking for that difference.....and this parable reveals it.....the difference is this: -the Pharisee was good...the publican was evil.....so the line is drawn!

But is there anything wrong with being good? And what, in heaven's name, is there right in being bad? But Jesus Christ, in this parable which you might refer to as the parable with the surprise ending---for surely they never expected it to end like that, when Jesus would sing the praise of a man who could not as much as muster up one good deed to his credit!...also speaks a word of condemnation for the man whose reputation had been established as being decent---honorable---religious! What can there be wrong about being good? What can there be right about being bad?

I submit to you this morning, that the Chairman of the Committee on Membership and Evangelism of this congregation, together with all the rest of us, would be thrilled and delighted if we received into membership into this congregation the type of church member which the Pharisee was!.....

.....to come to church every time the bell was rung!.....

.....to offer to teach a Sunday School class!.....

.....to sing, if one could sing!.....

.....to participate, fully, in all the organizational life of  
the congregation!.....

.....and, mind you, not only to tithe, but to more than tithe!...  
....If there anything wrong with being good?.....What's wrong with being this  
kind of church member?

The difference is this....the Pharisee was good---and he knew it!  
And when he went to church, Item #1 on the agenda--in fact the only item on  
the agenda....."God---I'm a good man".....then he would parade in front of  
God his virtues.....and then he'd thank God that he had this kind of virtue  
to parade.

On the other hand was the publican who, when he came to church, he  
couldn't think of one good deed that he'd even name before God, and the only  
thing he had to tell God was that he was a sinner.....that's all.

This is the difference! The one had arrived---he had a standard for  
goodness with which he ~~was~~ well pleased.....and the other was so ashamed  
of himself, that he couldn't even turn his head upward to face God---even  
though that was the only direction in which he could look!--he was so far down!

This parable is not as easy to appreciate and to fully understand as  
you may think! Even in the early hours of this morning, after I had turned  
my back upon the study with all that I'm sharing with you now fresh in my  
mind, going backward and forward, I was haunted by the thought.....why, it  
can't be!--is Jesus Christ encouraging evil?.....is Jesus Christ discouraging  
goodness?.....dare Jesus Christ afford to be so reckless in denouncing good-  
ness and decency and good religious membership in a congregation?---and sing  
the praise of a down-right, unmitigated, unadulterated sinner?

.....And then it occurred to me.....this is a parable about the  
relationship between God and the human soul! And what can God do for a man  
who has already arrived?.....what can heaven offer a man who brings a halo in  
his own hand? And this is the difference---this is the parable of the Pharisee  
and the Publican.....a man who had no need of God---as over against a man  
whose only need was God!

Studdert-Kennedy, dynamic, dedicated disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, served as a chaplain during World War I, and then, subsequently, became the pastor of that historic and world-wide known church, St. Martin in-the-fields, Trafalgar Square.....being a chaplain to the men in the troops afforded him an excellent opportunity to see men in the raw--divorced from home ties--living unnatural lives, in the face of all that goes with a period of war-time activity.....it held him in good stead when he had his parish, St. Martin in-the-fields.....

....He tells the story about a man--Hugh Thompson. Hugh Thompson was a chap who loved the Lord Jesus Christ. But Hugh Thompson had the battle of his life, constantly, with alcoholism---and he couldn't quite understand how he could really serve the Lord Jesus Christ when he was inebriated---and so he made up his mind he'd cut it off.....and I suppose, unless you'd be an alcoholic, or unless you've ever found yourself in the iron-like grip of the devil, no matter what the temptation may be, you can't appreciate this... ..but almost a near-miracle happened---for six months, Hugh Thompson stayed on the wagon.....and then Good Friday came, and of all things---how it ever happened, Hugh Thompson could never tell you, nor could his padre, nor could I....but Hugh Thompson fell, and he went on a terrible binge.....the recuperative powers were marvelous, and he regained a kind of sobriety by Easter Eve. Deeply penitent, he comes to his Padre---and here again, you can't appreciate this unless, from the depth of your soul, you've sought the Lord's face, as the guilty one.....he came to Studdert-Kennedy and actually, literally begged---for the privilege of coming to Holy Communion on Easter morning.

Studdert-Kennedy greeted him with silence--the kind of silence that can sear a man's soul---and then, exercising the God-given faculty of the priest, the father-confessor--he probed the depth of Hugh Thompson's soul to ascertain whether or not he was truly penitent.....and without any question, this was the penitent.....and Studdert-Kennedy said to him, "Very well,

"The Difference" (7)

Thompson, you come tomorrow morning. You receive the Sacrament---your Lord will be waiting for you, just as He was waiting for Peter after his denial."

Now, human nature being what human nature is, the story does not end at this point. It so happened that one of the vestrymen of St. Martin-in-the-Fields came to the Padre several days later, and he said, "Padre, I don't suppose that you know, and maybe you do, knowing you as I do....but Hugh Thompson came to receive the Sacrament on Easter Day in the morning!--all sanctimonious-like!.....Now Padre, I know, and some of the people know the kind of person he is---he went out on a binge on Good Friday!--the drunkard!--the hypocrite!.....and then he came and knelt on Easter Day in the morning!....."

"Now, Padre, you take me! When I want a binge, I'll go on a binge! ...whenever I feel like it, and I won't try to hide it!...and I don't care who knows it!....."

And then again, with the kind of silence that can sear a man's soul, Studdert-Kennedy said, with the insight into human nature given to him by God....."It doesn't take much of a man to say what you've just said!.... anyone can decide to go on a binge and then go on it!....but it takes something wonderful in a man to go on a binge and then come back and be terribly sorry, and to hate himself for having done it!"

This is the difference! As though there are only two kinds of people in the world! Jesus said, "Two men went up into the temple to pray"..... ..and each of us finds himself ultimately queuing behind either one of them.. ..ultimately, we're either the kind of person who has no need of God....or the kind of person whose only need is God! This is the difference! And it's this difference that can spell out the opening of Heaven's door, or whether it remains closed.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

"The Difference" (8)

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:....."

There is a difference!

THE CHRISTIAN WORKMAN

On this Labor Day Sunday, the sermon is entitled, "The Christian Workman," and the text is the 22nd verse of the 3rd chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians:

"And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord."

Somewhere I once read about a man who found himself in church every Sunday morning; but not being too literate, and being limited in the way in which he could participate in the program of the congregation, he felt himself quite inferior, when he knew that there were certain people who were able to teach Sunday School classes---there were certain people who could sing in the choir---there were certain men who enjoyed positions of responsibility in the life of the congregation in one way or another.....nonetheless, inferior as he felt, he came to church every Sunday...to church, in a small village.

But when he went home after church, and had the Sunday dinner with his family, he was wont to steal away to the little carpenter's shop that he had--for he was a carpenter--at the end of the lot on the property where they lived. He was known to secret himself in that carpenter's shop for about an hour's time every Sunday afternoon. You could not hear a saw--you could not hear him working the plane--there was little motion, if any. He did not go there to work. He went there to think...he went there to pray. And, in a little diary that he kept, illiterate as he was, he recorded the fact that every Sunday he went there and opened the Bible to one passage of Scripture--and his well-worn Bible proved the witness of what he was saying. It was always to the same verse....."Jesus, the carpenter's son"....."Jesus, the carpenter's son".....and he permitted himself a measure of pride as he would think and think



and think....."Jesus---carpenter---the same trade as mine!"

Those who knew him, knew that he did his work honestly and he did his work well. It would be a strange thing indeed if, when he died, he would not go in the wonderful knowledge that, even though he was denied witnessing for his Lord Jesus Christ by singing in the choir, teaching a Sunday School class, or by serving in some other way in the congregational life....that he would not permit himself to think that his hands were busily engaged, day after day, in doing something worthwhile, honestly and well.

This becomes a healthy thought for those of us who serve the Lord Jesus Christ in full-time Christian vocation, for we must never forget that, even though we may wear a clerical collar, we are never the Lord's only servants. And Martin Luther was perfectly right when he said that even the shoe repairman, who takes a pair of shoes and restores them--makes them safe and sound for children to wear, when they walk through the mud or in the rain, protecting them against all kinds of weather.....that a shoe repairman, who does his work honestly and well, performs a work acceptable in the sight of God, even as the priest who stands with folded hands before an altar.

What is the Christian Church, after it's all said and done? The Christian Church is made up of people who profess allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Church is made up of people who have promised to love, serve and obey Him. And who are those people? Less than 1% of them are people who are privileged to serve in full-time Christian professions or vocations.....more than 99% are men and women who go, on a Monday morning, into the market-place--to an office---to a factory---or may stay at a kitchen sink. This is the Christian Church.....the greater percentage of her people are people who work every single day keeping the machinery of life--industry and capital, if you please--in operation.

Some few years ago, when the First Presbyterian Church in the city of Williamsport was without a pastor....it was also during that same period that the mighty Susquehanna overflowed her banks and wrought havoc in many sections of that city--water as deep as 10-12 feet in the city square....it seemed to have rent asunder First Presbyterian Church. It took weeks until the pews and the floors and the altar and the chancel and even the organ were restored to their proper usefulness.

There was a layman in that congregation who thought up a very apt and proper thing---several paragraphs that he had printed as an insert in the church bulletin board. I do not remember the exact wording; but it went something like this.....

"The doors of this First Presbyterian Church building are temporarily closed.  
But let everyone take notice....this building, in itself, is not the real First Presbyterian Church.  
The real First Presbyterian Church is scattered all over the city of Williamsport, where her members go their daily occupations and perform their work, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.....  
This is the First Presbyterian Church---where her members are at work at their daily jobs."

It is something that we ought never to forget. The Christian Church is people....and people who spend, perhaps, one hour--two hours--in church on a Sunday morning. The greater part of their waking hours, they spend where they work, on their way to work, or their way from work, or thinking something about their work.

Someone has figured out that the average person, living an average life, spends at least fifteen full years of his life at his work! More than half of our waking hours, in the course of a normal day, we spend going to our work, at our work, or getting home from our work! Now since this occupies so large a chunk of a person's life, and since the Christian Church is made up of 99 and more percent of people who go to a daily job, the Christian Church, on

Labor Day Sunday, has a right and a duty to ask her people....."What kind of a Christian workman are you?" The Apostle Paul says, "Whatever you do, you are to do it heartily, as unto the Lord."

What is the Christian workman? It would seem to me that the Christian workman, in the first place, is a man who is willing to offer his day's work in the sight of God. Now, that puts a strange kind of limitation upon this text.... even though the text says, "whatever you do, you do it heartily unto the Lord"... that doesn't mean that anyone who happens to be a Christian can do anything, whatever it may be, and say....."Lord, this is the kind of thing that I want You to smile upon with favor." A man who takes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, having committed himself in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, may find himself deliberately changing jobs, if he feels that the job that he's doing is the kind of work that cannot be pleasing in God's sight. The Christian workman is, first of all, the man who can offer his day's work as something upon which he wants God to smile with favor.

In the second place, the Christian workman is one who, when he works, gives the best that he has to his day's activity. Over in England, one time, they had a mission that was geared directly to people in industry.....and once upon a time there was a man who came forward as a convert, in the factory where he worked, and then he said to the man who was responsible for his conversion.... "Now, what do I do next?".....and the man said to him--"You go back and you try to convert the man who works alongside of you!" I wonder sometimes, if I would have given that kind of advice. The Lord Jesus Christ depends upon people to tell other people about Him---there's no question about that....but it would also seem to me that, side by side with that piece of advice, the preacher should also have said...."Well, you go back to this job that you have, and you make certain, now, that, as a Christian, you give your boss an honest day's work." This,

too, is a bit of advice that dare not be forgotten, on behalf of the Christian Church....to encourage men and women, where they work, to make sure that industry or the office or whatever it may be for whom they work, get the best that they had to offer. It's the old story---if you're a foreman, you know it full well....if you're the supervisor in your office, you know exactly what I'm talking about....even as a member of this parish said to me yesterday--"My greatest headache where I work is with the type of help that I have to put up with---never quite certain, when they do come, whether they will give an honest day's work." We have a right to expect Christian people to be honest, and honesty on the part of the Christian workman means a good day's work.

In the third place, he who is a Christian workman should also be a person who enjoys the satisfaction in the knowledge that what he is doing is benefitting the total community. This may not be easy in some jobs that are highly specialized---it may not be easy for some people, when they find themselves quite removed from the rest of the world....it may not be very easy when they find themselves doing what almost seems like an insignificant thing--just another link in a great chain--the end of a chain they never see.....but if you ever purchased an automobile and you discovered, within the month, perhaps, after you purchased it, that now there is an apparent failure, and when you complain to the man from whom you purchased it, he simply says, on occasion....  
.. "Well, if you'd see today's assembly line, you could understand why this can happen!" If the man, perhaps, on the assembly line, could permit himself to think, ever so often, that even though this one thing that he does is far removed from the purchaser, that he might see or know, nonetheless, it is terribly, terribly important.

Each of us, whatever our work may be, ought to be doing the kind of work where we could say, when we went home at night, "Someone stands to benefit from what I've done today." Diversified as this congregation may be right now, think

what would happen, if I went down this aisle and I stopped, and each one of you told the rest of us where you'll be going on Tuesday morning, and the kind of work that you'll be doing. How diversified could be the answers! And yet, in the Christian context, heaven help you if you can't feel that no matter what you're going to do on Tuesday morning, it can't be the kind of thing that is useful to humanity, calling your own best.....and the kind of thing which, when you end your years, you can offer to God.

I have visited certain church offices, sometimes, and I found an interesting thing in the church office.....a map of Montgomery County, and more particularly, a map of Silver Spring---and then the secretary or the chairman of the committee on membership has gone there and spotted the different areas where the members of that congregation live. It would seem to me it would also be equally significant if there could be a map showing the different places where the members of that congregation worked.....just in passing, I suppose, because this is the Christian Church---where people are.....and wherever we may be, God expects us to prove ourselves good witnesses for Him.

Leslie Weatherhead tells the story of a servant girl who is found quite ill in a hospital bed....and a worker for the church had gone visiting in the ward in the hospital....and when she came upon this girl, she discovered that she had never been baptized, never been confirmed, and had never been able to take an active part in the life of the Christian congregation. Showing very poor wisdom, the church worker said...."What are you going to do when you die?---and the Lord takes you to account for your life---and you'll never be able to tell Him that you were active in the church?".....I say she used poor wisdom and poor tact, for she never understood that this girl was forced, at home, to do menial chores by parents who did not bring her up in the Christian faith---she was forced, in isolation from the Christian congregation.....

.....but the girl had the perfect answer. She pulled out from underneath the sheets hands that were soiled and worn by daily work, and she simply said...."I will show Him my hands."

When our last hour may come--we who are in duty bound to give the Lord a day's work.....He will look ~~not~~ only upon our hearts, but He'll wonder what we've done with our hands---with our minds.....because the greater part of our waking hours are given to this sort of thing, and God holds us responsible for that, too.

"INTRUSIVE LOVE"

This morning's sermon, entitled, "Intrusive Love," is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, and the text is a portion of the 33rd and the 34th verses of the 10th chapter of Luke:

"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion and went to him...."

When Jesus was here on earth He wanted so much, not only to break through to people's hearts, but also to break through into their minds. And quite frequently, in order to establish a point, that they couldn't possibly misunderstand, he would tell them a story. He would clothe it, as best He could, in the familiar. And after He had told the story, then He wanted them to know that this was the reason why He was telling it, and this was the point that He didn't want them to miss.

The unfortunate thing is that people have missed the point of many of the parables that Jesus spoke. Whether we are willing to identify ourselves with the naive-minded Sunday School boy or not, it could be that we are still something of the Sunday School boy who, when he was told the parable of the Good Samaritan, for the first time, and having been asked by his Sunday School teacher, "What does this parable mean?"....the little boy replied, "It means that when we are in trouble, other people should come and help us."

Now, this may be one point that you like to think is inherent in this parable of the Good Samaritan, but this is not the main reason why Jesus Christ told this parable. He was not putting the accent upon the fact that people who are in trouble should go their way through life expecting other people to help them. They could be disappointed. For, if the parable of the Good Samaritan means any-

"Intrusive Love" (2)

thing at all, it does mean that you have only one chance out of three, if your chances would be that good, of having somebody help you when you are in distress.

But the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is not that we should expect people to help us.....the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that we should expect to help people, when we find them in need. The accent is upon the person who might be in a position to help somebody. Jesus said, "Take your attention, for the moment, away from the man who's been victimized, and take a good long look at yourself, and ask yourself whether or not you are the kind of a person who goes through life, forever trying to help people."

Jesus was always talking about the kind of love that breaks through to people's needs. Jesus was always talking about the kind of love that went out of its way to be good to people. That's why He must have been terribly disappointed when, as He told the story, He had to say that there was the kind of person in life who would victimize people.....and, if that isn't bad enough, there is always the kind of person who, when he finds people are victimized, passes them by on the other side---being in a position to help, they've had no concern, whatsoever, for the one less fortunate than they.

....It's a very easy thing to love people who are lovable.....

.....it's a very easy thing to befriend someone who is already a friend of yours.....

.....and one may become in duty bound to do good to someone who, before this, has already done good to you--and whatever act of mercy you now show, it is simply payment in kind, because you already have been on the receiving end.....

.....this kind of love--this kind of mercy, we may be able to understand, and heaven help us if we can't.....



"Intrusive Love" (3)

.....to love people who are lovable.....

.....to be good to people who have been good to us.....

.....to befriend one who is already a friend and who has  
already proven his friendship for you.....

.....to be gracious when it is convenient.....

.....but to go out of one's way to be compassionate....and to show mercy to  
someone who is far from being attractive....to be kind to a stranger? --and, what  
is more, to become extravagant with your compassion!.....

You're not overlooking it, are you? Once the Good Samaritan had put the  
man upon his own beast--and once he had taken him to the inn, he, himself, took  
care of him. When he was assured that the fellow was well on the road to recovery,  
even though he might need continued attention, it was the Samaritan who said,  
"We don't stop at this point...and whatever else he may need, you give it to him,  
and when I come back this way, I will pay you for it."

To talk about a love that's as extravagant as all that! That's precisely  
what Jesus Christ was talking about. This is the kind of love that you and I do  
not practice enough, if we ever practice it at all. This is the sad indictment  
that must be placed against you and me, for, generally speaking--generally speaking---we  
love the lovable....and we are good to the decent....we show compassion  
when it's convenient....we won't hesitate to help someone we may know.....

.....to go out of our way!.....

.....to love at a price!.....and even to do it at the risk of  
our own lives!.....

.....love that is daring---love that is extravagant!--a love  
that is reckless.....

may not be as typical of you and me as, in Christ's Name, it ought to be. Now  
this is the point that Jesus Christ is making.

## "Intrusive Love" (4)

Now, in order to appreciate the role of the Good Samaritan, and he is the central figure in the story, why not try to look at it through the eyes of the man that he befriended. Now, for the moment, do that. Be kind enough not to take him to task. Don't be cruel enough to shake your finger and say, "You're a fool for ever having traveled that road by yourself.....you should never have gone unarmed or unprotected." Don't talk that kind of language to a man who's already beaten.....but it could be that out of a perfectly clear, blue sky, this man, on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, becomes the victim of his fellow men. It is one thing to be robbed--it is one thing to have taken away from you the things that you cherish because you know the thing that you wanted to do with what you had---it is one thing to feel your body ache, limb by limb....but think what it also meant to his spirit. "How could there be people like that?.....how could life be as cruel as all this to me?"

One of the unpleasant things that I deal with in my own mind, ever so often, is that I have known some people in my ministry, in the name of Jesus Christ, that I haven't been able to help very much---the mind has become so diseased and the spirit has become so broken, that they remain, what seems to be forever, in nervous disorder.....for the simple reason that, at one time in their life, they were dealt a vicious blow, and they were never able to have their faith in mankind restored. At a time in their life, perhaps, when they needed it most, no one loomed on their horizon as this Good Samaritan.

That's exactly what the Good Samaritan did. Out of the same clear, blue sky that brought the vicious blow--lo and behold!--this victim discovers a stranger who comes to him.....not to hurt, but to help. As men waited, and then left him half-dead, this man goes out of his way to lift him up! Think what that must have done, not only to his body, but think how it restored his spirit!.....to know that, in this old world of ours, there is the kind of per-

son who will go out of his way to become an angel of mercy. His body was restored, and so was his soul.

One of the most wonderful persons that I have ever known in life was a man who was an outstanding political figure.....and when he died---what seemed to us an untimely death--the whole community reacted as though it had lost its own very personal friend. Now, this type of thing did not happen because he had--and I do not say it unkindly--the politician's glad smile and the politician's glad hand.....this kind of thing happened because---in a moment of revelation, he told me of motivation in his life...I suppose it happens when people reach a certain kind of mental and spiritual maturity---he had made up his mind never to go to bed at night without being able to recall that somewhere, someone, in the course of the day, had had a little kindness done to them because of him.....and if at all possible, he hoped that when the day came to an end, that kindness might have been done because he went out of his way to do it. One of the most wonderful persons that I have ever known, who went out of his way---to be good---to someone.

As the Pastor of this parish, I share this with you now.....I'm not much concerned what may happen here, Sunday after Sunday, when you smile to the person who happens to smile to you.....but I am troubled a little bit about the person who comes to this church, lonely and discouraged, because, in the past week, they have been dealt a vicious blow--because they haven't quite recovered....they just don't have it quite in them to go their way smiling gladly at everybody that they see.....but that person could find the difference between night and day if maybe, as they left this pew, these people---one of you would do nothing more, perhaps, than this---just smile!---in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

I'm not much worried about the member of this parish who's been already blessed with a very pleasant temperament--finds it easy to make friends and to hold friends.....but I am worried about the member of this parish who, having been dealt some unfortunate blow, has become a bit embittered and soured, and no one of you, perhaps, in this congregation, may go out of his way to just do the kind of thing that might restore faith in humanity.

Maybe I should worry more about the person who is in the position to do the smiling and doesn't do it---who's in the position to stretch forth a helping hand and doesn't do it. Let me warn you---the Devil will give you 101 reasons why you shouldn't do it...."Why should I get involved with other people's lives?....why should I get involved with other people's troubles?"

Once upon a time, the gates of heaven parted, and God's Only Begotten Son came from heaven to earth.....just because He knew why He should break through into people's lives---with a kind of intrusive love that would enable them to have their faith in God and man restored.

This is not a platitude that I say to you so easily, as I say it to you, remembering a man who had been a great success, and somebody said..."Why?"..... and he simply replied, with profound reverence...."There was a moment in my life when I needed a friend---and I had one!" Now this is a platitude that I do not speak easily....."No man is hopeless who has a friend.....no man is useless who is a friend."

There'd be no hope for you and me, if the Son of God had not gone out of His way to break through into your life, to intrude into your heart....and that's reason enough to pass it on, in His spirit, to somebody else.

"THE GRATEFUL LEPER"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, is entitled, "The Grateful Leper," and the text, the 15th verse of the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice, glorified God."

The title for the sermon has been carefully chosen, and I dare add rather quickly, and correctly so. At first glance, you may not agree--you may be inclined to say...."Call him no longer a leper--simply refer to him as the 'grateful one' who, having received a wonderful blessing, came back to say, "thank you" to Jesus Christ.....he who came back is no longer leprous....he who came back is the 'cured one'---how can you call a man grateful who has yet to express his gratitude?"

Ah, my friend, having received something wonderful in life simply gives you the opportunity to show what you already are. Gratitude is a seed that is sown deep in the heart and soul of a man. And every now and then, life gives you an opportunity to give expression to it. The great and wonderful moments in life do not make us grateful. We either are or are not already grateful. The great and wonderful moment in life simply gives us the opportunity to reveal our true nature.

I submit to you this morning, and this sermon, I suppose, to all intents and purposes becomes a justification of this thesis.....that long before the leper met Jesus Christ, the seed of gratitude was being nurtured in his soul. This is the only way, it seems to me, that you can explain the fact that only one out of ten came back to say "thank you".....for a man is either by nature grateful or ungrateful.

"The Grateful Leper" (2)

Let's go back, now, and look at this.....our Blessed Lord was on His way to Jerusalem, and as He was making His journey toward this great city, He came near to the border of Samaria in Galilee. Now, wait a moment---He's on His way to some place else.....

.....it could be that He has an appointment.....

.....it could be that He's thinking very much about the things

that He wants to do when He gets to Jerusalem.....

.....maybe He has an agenda, even as He has an itinerary.....

but you have a right to read between the lines, when you read, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, the Good Book.....and dare we not believe that as He journeys toward Jerusalem, He is now confronted by these ten lepers---this is something, if you please, that was not on the schedule....this is something, now, that is happening incidentally.....and what does our Lord Jesus Christ do?

If you want to be as human as most of us are, you could find it very easy to excuse Him from showing mercy to these people. If He is bent on going to Jerusalem, then surely what's going to happen in Jerusalem must be very, very important.....and if He has a schedule to maintain, then let's let Him maintain His schedule.....why be side-tracked?....why be deterred?.....why be delayed?

But remember, you're dealing now with Jesus Christ. He is no ordinary human being. He is the Personification of Love! He is God Incarnate!.....and as He journeys toward Jerusalem, He comes near to Samaria and Galilee and is confronted by ten men in dire need. Therefore, Love will stoop, because Love knows no schedule. Love must give itself immediately to the need which is at hand.

Some of us are inclined to think that a number of things can wait, right now---we'll give ourselves to the schedule that must be maintained.....and all the while, any number of good and proper things that ought to be done, right now, go undone--remain undone. But, in the name of Love, this should not happen. For Love keeps no schedule!....Love must give itself to the thing at hand.

### "The Grateful Leper" (3)

You want a very simple illustration?.....the mother who is busy preparing for dinner at the kitchen sink. Dinner should be ready at six o'clock, and we eat on schedule. While she's peeling the potatoes and getting the carrots ready for the casserole, lo and behold!--the child tumbles....in its fear and in its anxiety, the child cries. The mother does not say...."I cannot give you attention now--supper must be made ready--we must eat at six o'clock....." .....love makes its own demand and Love gets its own attention immediately. Jesus Christ, the Personification of Love, on His way to some other place, to do something else for someone else, stops where He is, and is confronted by ten men in dire need...for Love knows no schedule---Love must be ready to give itself to the need of the present moment.

Now, when He is confronted by these ten men, mark you well!--that they share a common misery---each one is leprous. And you have a right to make much of this when you read the scripture---that together they cried out for mercy. They did not elect one of their number to become the chairman....they didn't say to themselves....."Well now, let's see--surely some day Jesus Christ is going to come this way, and when He does come, we'd better get organized....and one of our number had better represent us....."---they didn't elect anyone to do that. When Jesus Christ comes near them, with one voice, and all voices participating, each man cries out...."Jesus, have mercy upon me!--as much as though he would not be willing to allow anyone else to express his dire need---so great is his need that he will cry out to God himself! These men have this in common.....a common affliction.....a common misery.....and a common desire to represent, each man, his own case before Jesus Christ.

They also had this in common.....that when Jesus Christ gave the directive, they obeyed. So great was their need, that they were willing to do---immediately---anything that Jesus Christ would suggest. And do you remember,

"The Grateful Leper" (4)

from reading this account of the miracle, that it was 'as they went' that they were made whole! As soon as they began to obey, the miracle began to happen. Now, let's ask ourselves this question....when God gives us a directive--when, in our dire need, we make a plea for something and God suggests a procedure, are we as quick to obey? God Himself may be the only one who knows how much good goes by our lives--how many benefits we never know....for the simple reason that we are unwilling to follow His directive. The miracle for the lepers began to happen as soon as they began to obey. The basis for the fulfillment of their desire was to be found in their willingness to obey.

They had this in common.....a common misery.....a willingness to cry out to God.....a willingness to obey.....but, at this point, they began to differ. You now divide them into two groups---one man by himself---nine men in a group.....for in this very poignant passage from scripture, only one of them comes back to say "thank you." I submit to you this morning, the thesis of this sermon---he was, by nature, a grateful person. He is to be catalogued as the grateful leper who, despite his leprosy---even while a leper---he kept alive a spark of gratitude within his soul.

I cannot tell you very easily why nine men refused to come back to say "thank you"---I can hazard a guess.....

.....it could be that they were so taken up with this wonderful thing that had happened--that all they could do was talk about the wonderful thing that had happened....and they didn't give much recognition to the person who had made possible the wonderful thing.....

.....it could be that they were so busy getting back to their loved ones--it could be that they were so eager to get back to the normality of life, that they weren't willing to take the time to go back and say "thank you".....



"The Grateful Leper" (5)

.....now, knowing human nature as I do, I am constrained to admit, to myself at least, that it could be that several of them in this band, as soon as they found out that they were made whole, couldn't wait until they got where other people were, and where they could face these other people and take them to task....because all the while they were lepers, they had been ostracized--they had to live like dogs--they remembered the inhumane treatment some people had given them, once they became afflicted....and they kept nursing this sour quality in their soul....maybe they said..."If we ever do get well, I'll lay those people low!"

In prayer and meditation, before any of these services began, I found myself in the quiet beauty of the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. I took a good long look at the second window on the Highland Drive side. There is portrayed for us, the character in this miracle--the leper. I tried to let that leper come down from the stained glass. I tried to picture him, not today, as a picture, but as a human being who was forced to live out his years unto death--to die, inch by inch. I tried even to smell, what must have been a terrible thing that came from those bandages around his legs and his arms....I tried almost to hear the hoarseness of his voice, as he cried out.....you see, we don't know what leprosy is like. Whatever we know about it is what we've read in the Bible and what Sunday School teachers have told us and what pictures we get from stained glass windows like this one or perhaps from the chapter or two that you've read in Ben Hur.....lepers were completely isolated---they lived in caves---the food they had was thrown to them like food is thrown to dogs. The leper pictured in this stained glass window is a leper who has a bell in his hand.....a bell--not a beggar's bell, mark you!--to get people to pay attention to him, that they might give him ~~him~~ alms--sometimes it's interpreted that way,

## "The Grateful Leper" (6)

but you can also understand it in this fashion.....he was in duty bound to warn people that he was near, and the bell becomes a warning signal....."I'm in duty bound, a leper, to tell you that I'm here, so that you can keep your distance.....".....and as long as he had any breath that could go through his lips and form any kind of a word, he was supposed to cry---"Unclean!...Unclean!"

There was an old Jewish law that said that, if the wind would be blowing, every leper would have to make certain that he was at least fifty feet away from the nearest human being, lest the wind blow over the leper and contaminate the man who was well. This was the kind of life they had to live!...in bitterness ....no wonder their souls could grow sour!

But there was one of them---one leper, so it would seem to me, who never allowed his soul to become sour or his spirit to become bitter. That's why I call him the 'grateful leper' !----for even while he was leprous, the seed of gratitude was alive within his soul!.....and when the great moment came of the cure, it simply gave him an opportunity to show how grateful he was!

I am convinced that one of the most wonderful words that God ever hears from a human being, next to the cry for pardon.....God, it seems to me, must delight in hearing sinners say..."Help me!"....."Save me!"....."Redeem Me!".... for this is what God wants most to do!.....I am convinced that next to this cry for pardon and help, the most wonderful thing that God must ever hear must be something that's not in God's vocabulary---did you ever stop to think of certain words that do not appear in God's vocabulary?----"thank you" does not belong in God's vocabulary....."thank you" is something that should be peculiar to man, for God is the Eternal Giver---man is the perpetual receiver.... ....and it seems to me that, next to the cry for pardon, the most wonderful thing that God wants to hear from any human being....."thank you"---Thank You!"

I once knew a man who went to Europe for the first time. And he was fully

aware of the fact that when he would get to Europe, he'd be visiting many countries where the language would be strange to him. He made up his mind that there was something that he wanted to learn that he'd be able to say in each country that he would visit. For the same thing that he wanted to learn for each country was not...."I'm hungry--give me bread--where can I eat?".....not ...."I'm thirsty--give me something to drink!".....the words that he learned first, for any country----"thank you".....and he was inclined to believe that no matter where he went on his journey, he would eventually find himself in debt to someone, for this, too, is basic about life. For God has a great bounty, and God's cup is constantly overflowing in many places and in many ways, and eventually you and I come in for that overflow.

Life in a parsonage is always interesting. I think life in our parsonage, as a parsonage family, was never more interesting than that time, about eight or ten years back, when it seemed as though we had a constant flow of friends from Europe---driven to our shores because the thing they wanted most to see was Lady Liberty, with her up-raised hand...."Come! I give you refuge!" .....driven to our shores because of persecution and other reasons....we were able to share what we had with them.

One of them, a 79-year old woman, from one of the Baltic countries...she knew no English whatsoever.....reverently we referred to her as "grossmudder"...she came in silence--she'd return to her room in silence. One day, the moment of moments came.....as she finished her meal, and as she got up from the table, her first words in the English tongue--broken, but unmistakably clear..."thank you." Nothing that she could ever have said could ever mean quite as much to us as that!

"And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back".....the giving of thanks is based upon a decision. It never happens casually.....

"And one of them when he saw that he was healed, turned back and came

"The Grateful Leper" (8)

with a loud voice, glorifying God...".....even as he himself asked God  
to help him, so he himself will come back to say "thank you".....  
.....and when he did, Jesus Christ told him something that none of the  
nine ever heard. This is the added blessing that comes to the grateful heart.

"GO--TEACH--"

The sermon bears the title, "Go, Teach--". It is based upon the text, which is a portion of the 19th verse of the 28th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach....."

How the disciples must have remembered these words. And the proof that they remembered them so well lies in the fact that you and I are here today.

Last words are usually quite significant. Let the word be spread that so-and-so died of a heart attack, and immediately his friends and associates will respond by...."I just saw him last night, and he said to me....."---and we seem to cling tenaciously to the last words that we heard them speak, and then we try to attach, perhaps, more than ordinary significance....."they were his last words."

These were the last words of Jesus Christ, spoken to His disciple band--to twelve men, minus one, who saw Him and heard Him for the last time on this earth. Again and again they must have remembered...."this is what He said--we are to go and tell other people!--we daren't keep this thing to ourselves!----think of it!.....this was His directive--to each of us--He said....'Go!...'Teach!..'....'Make disciples!..'.....

Disciples are to be claimed for the Kingdom of God through the sharing of the Word. And so the Kingdom of God had been expanded--and so the borders of the Kingdom have been extended....not alone by person to person, but, I dare say, from person through person, and because this continuing directive has been obeyed by every generation of Christians, you and I are here right now.....and because we want to make certain that tomorrow's group of Christians may know it--you are here right now.

All that I'm about to say today has ninety-five men and women of this parish in mind particularly--ninety-five men and women who have taken upon themselves the holy obligation to make certain that the continuing directive of Jesus Christ is fulfilled in this day, and in this place. Let me tell you that unfortunately, in many quarters, this whole matter of Christian growth through training is allowed to happen spasmodically. There are some people who permit themselves to think, "Well, they'll grow up Christian--let them have Christian parents--get them to Sunday School occasionally".....and that's the way you get your Christian man and woman for tomorrow. Wittingly or unwittingly, we are foolish enough, sometimes, to believe that the whole cause of Christian education can be done effectively, one way or another. God help us!...if we in Saint Luke Church ever subscribe to the principle that adherence to the directive of Jesus Christ can be followed in just one way or another! This church has already committed herself that it should be done in the best possible way and by the best dedicated staff.

It may please you to know that, last Sunday afternoon, a group of us, representing a portion of the life and the leadership of this congregation, met in a meeting that was called the Parish Cabinet. We represented all strata of leadership in this congregation. At that time, we reviewed some of the work that's been done in the twenty years of this congregation. We focused our eyes particularly upon the last four and one-half years and then we gave, perhaps, a hurried look as to what might yet come.

But there are two words that we tried to underline and that is that the thing most needful in Saint Luke Church right now is depth and quality.....now, since God has given us a structure.....now since God has given us an outline.... now that we do have a philosophy---we must improve the quality of the product--- we must make certain that the Christian who is growing up through the influence of Saint Luke Church becomes the best possible Christian.

It is not easy to do this. I am in duty bound to tell you several things that may not be pleasing to your ear. Unfortunately, for a large percentage of people, in your acquaintance and in mine, there is subscription to the fact that the cause of Christian education can take care of itself. Like Topsy in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, it will 'just grow up'. Proof that this could be true for you?--thinking that it will take care of itself....may lie in the fact that your answers to a question such as this may not be too satisfactory.....

.....how long has it been since you have made a prayer for those who teach and for those who staff the program of Christian education in this parish?.....

.....how long has it been since you have been the person to introduce some other person to the program of Christian education--not, perhaps, as a teacher or a staff member, but as a boy or as a girl?.....

.....how long has it been since you came and sat in this nave, during this hour, and even so much as gave an occasional thought that, right now, in the educational wing of this church structure, and also at 11:00 o'clock, somewhere between 500 and 700 boys and girls, with a small number of adults during 9:30, will be coming to receive what could be the only significant amount of religious education that they're going to get at all.

....how long has it been that you have given this kind of thing anything more than a passing thought?--as to whether or not you would qualify as a staff member....as to whether or not you have ever brought anyone outside the immediate confines of your own family circle.....as to whether or not you have lifted up in the arms of your petitions, those who represent us--beneath us in Bieber Hall, and over here in the Christian Education wing, right now, and again at 11:00 o'clock.

It could be said, whether we like to hear it or not, that in all too many areas there are those who take the whole cause of Christian education for granted--

say that it will be done one way or another.....there will always be a Sunday School--one way or another. I would remind you of this....that no matter how good our efforts may be, those of us who are inclined to take this responsibility seriously---our efforts are still not worthy of the whole cause of Christian education. Please do not misunderstand me, but even among staff members, the preparation for the Sunday School lesson and the Sunday School hour may be the gathering up of a fragmentary effort. It could be that whatever time remains, we might give to a concern for the boys and girls who are under us---fragmentary efforts. It could be that for us, when we come on a Sunday morning, those of us who are charged with the responsibility of Christian education, that we do not say to ourselves.....

....."I am reporting for duty!....."

.....I am under assignment!....."

....I am remembering the parting command of Jesus Christ!....."

.....I am here in the Sunday School class room this morning  
because I am under orders!....."

.....It was my Lord who said, 'Go--and teach!'"....."

Happy indeed is that Sunday School youngster whose teacher is at his or her place because that Sunday School teacher is there by way of a holy obligation--under orders....."My Lord said I should teach!"

Now, when we accept this obligation and this responsibility today, I am also in duty bound to remind that which will not be pleasing to your ears. Numerically speaking, the Sunday School teacher today is giving himself to a losing battle.....numerically speaking--the Sunday School teacher, today, is giving himself to a program that is losing ground! While there is such a thing as a population explosion, the rate of increase within the Christian church has not kept pace.



We are not growing Christians as rapidly as we are simply growing people. It seems incredible that in this metropolitan Washington area, in the last decade or fourteen or fifteen years, the population has increased more than a half-million, and yet, as I look over the records of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Maryland, comprising significant congregations in the Baltimore and Washington areas, where the population boom has been on, we were not able to tally up, last year, a one percent increase in active church relationship over the preceding year!

One of the hardest places in the world to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, here in the United States, is west of the Rockies. People have a way of leaving their religion on this side of the Great Divide, once they cross it. And yet in the Los Angeles area alone, there is a population increase somewhere between six hundred and one thousand people every day.....and the church and the Sunday School is not matching this growth.

In New York City, where there are over 960,000 Protestants, 55% of them are already people other than the white race, and because this is true, there has not been the rapid stride toward evangelism as we have a right to expect.

This is the kind of problem that faces us in many areas. We have no right to lull ourselves in complacency, just because this congregation happens to be one that has shown marked strides of growth in her two decades of history. It simply means that the challenge to us is all the more great, for we are in duty bound to produce a youngster who is firmly rooted and grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ; and if elsewhere, numerically speaking, we are falling down, then let it be said that the boy and the girl and the adult who is growing up in Saint Luke Church knows the ground whereon he stands.

The key word for us is depth and quality, even as over against the fact that we have a marked limitation of time in which to do it. Do you realize, my friend, that the boy and girl, fifteen years of age, has not spent as much time in

Sunday School, in the accumulation of hours, as the boy and girl who go to the public school from the Christmas vacation until the summer vacation begins.....the youngster who has had fifteen years of Sunday School has a total accumulation of hours less than a half-term--a half-year, in the public school.....and where is the person who would permit himself to think that a half-year in the public school system can adequately train the mind for the world in which he must live? That means--given so little time, we must do so much!

Do not despair, my friend. Your great assignment does not lie simply in giving out so many facts and figures concerning the Christian religion to a boy or girl. Your greatest assignment comes in the fact that you are able to share your life and your spirit with these boys and girls. This is the great assignment of the Sunday School---to share the Spirit of Jesus Christ!

We dare not forget that, for some boys and girls, their first introduction to the Family of God comes around the Sunday School class room....their first real relationship with Christian people, aside from their home, comes from the kind of thing they feel and experience when, in the cluster of pupils, they meet with a Sunday School teacher.

I shall not personally despair from the fact that it does look as though we're losing ground, numerically speaking. But the challenge is greater still, because when a Christian must be produced, he must be firmly rooted in that which is eternal.....and to this you give your talent.

October 9, 1960

"THE SOUL'S HARVEST"

The sermon, in keeping with this day, is entitled, "The Soul's Harvest," and the text is from the Gospel for the day, a portion of the 20th verse of the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And God said unto him, Fool, thy soul shall  
be required of thee this night...."

Saint Luke Church includes in her schedule the Festival of the Harvest and as we mark the day, there are at least two very simple observations that ought to rest very definitely in the fabric of our minds.

The first reason for marking the Festival of the Harvest is this--that we who live in suburbia ought not to forget that it is by the Hand of God that we are sustained. Ours is an age of gadgetry...one presses a button and this happens...one presses another button and something else occurs. It may be exceedingly difficult for contemporary man to think about the prime mover of all things--He who began these things--the Master-Mind....and for those of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Father--whose hand, outstretched to us, is never empty.

Placed upon these windows in the nave....placed attractively enough in the narthex as you entered....here about the altar.....the fruits of the earth, that we should never, never forget that it is through the unfailing bounty of God that, day by day, you and I have our existence. The theme for the Festival of the Harvest could well be the hymn that we've just sung, and the words of the poet, such as these:

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,  
Back of the flour is the mill;  
Back of the mill are the wind and the shower  
And the sun, and the Father's will."

"The Soul's Harvest" (2)

This is the first justification for including in the schedule of this church a service such as this, marking the Festival of the Harvest, that we might never, never forget that God's outstretched hand is never empty--is the means by which we are sustained.

And there's a second reason why we observe the Festival of the Harvest, and that is that we might note well the lesson that comes to us from the autumn-tide itself. Whether you are willing to accept it or not, there is a note of finality about autumn that we are in duty bound to recognize. It's the closing of the year---seed-time is over, the farmer has done his cultivating---this, now, is the time for the gathering of the crops, and we have only to face results. Once autumn has come, a man cannot go back and relive the spring-time---the season of spring and summer have run their course....there is an air of finality about autumn.

And I suppose that's one reason why some people do not feel as keenly about autumn as they do about the spring-time---there is an exuberance about March and April and May....there's something strangely stimulating about the spring, and it's easy for a man to fall in love with spring. But can a man fall in love with the autumn-tide? Could it be possible that a man would prefer it of all the seasons of the year? Wise philosopher Santiyana once said to those who fell in love with spring...."It's far better to develop an interest in the changing seasons, than to fall hopelessly in love with spring."

When you read the book of Job, you will come face to face with a very strange statement that he made, if you read it in the original. Wise old man Job once said that he longed for the days of the autumn of his life....and you and I are inclined to say---"That's a mistake--that hasn't been properly recorded....does a man really want to grow old?....would a man prefer to live forever in the autumn-tide of his life?" It's so contrary to the kind of thing that

"The Soul's Harvest" (3)

you and I so frequently say....."If I had only to live my days over again!...."  
....."If I could only begin my work right now!....." For a good many people,  
there is

made it his business to go to the college campus when the new students arrived..  
....and he knew a particular kind of delight in taking the freshmen to task. He'd  
corner one of them, and then this would be the kind of dialogue that would take  
place between them.....

"What did you come here for?"

Invariably, the freshman would say,

"To get an education."

And then the old man would launch out on a series of questions--always the same  
two words....and a question mark.....

"What'd you come here for?"

The reply of the young man,

"To get an education."

And then the old man,

"And after that?"

"To get a job".

"And after that?"

"To make a fortune."

"And after that?"

"To retire....to enjoy myself....to live off of the benefits of my  
hard work....."

You see yourself in the picture, don't you?....this is the great American dream.....

And then the old man, true to style, said to the young man, who'd said  
that after he made his fortune he was going to sit down and retire and enjoy it..  
....the old man said,

"And after that?"

....and the young man thought and thought and thought.....and came up with the  
only possible answer that could be given....rather reluctantly and ruefully, he

said,

"Well, I suppose, like all other men, I shall some day die."

And then the wise old man brought again, once more, the question,

"And after that?"

This is what it means, you see, to concern yourself with the fact that, some day, there will be a harvest of the soul, in which God will stand and will look at each one of us and not concern Himself overmuch with what we have in our hand---He will not look longingly, perhaps, at what we have in our bank balance, --and He may not take us too much to task for what we have in titles and deeds.. ..but He'll concern Himself with the harvest of the heart--the reapings of the soul!

An unfortunate thing about this generation is that we haven't thought too much about the soul. We talk enough about a man's mind and his body and his emotions.....but you watch some of the plays--some of the great dramatic productions of our era.....and they're calling this generation, again and again, to the fact that a man has a soul---and the hour will come when each man stands before God, naked.....and God faces us---with our results.

Life is the most precious thing that God can give. And God, my friend, does not deal in duplicates....the life that He gives to you and to me, He gives to you and to me, alone. When our last hour may come, it will be the harvest of our souls that we present. Do not dread it, my friend--you don't have to be afraid of growing old! It is possible for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to wear his years graciously and well, for it can be the time of maturity and of the full corn. To that end, on this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest in Saint Luke Church, I would concern you with the only thing that matters eventually---the harvest of the soul.

James Black has said it so well....."Brethren, all of us have to face

"The Soul's Harvest" (6)

the autumn, if we are granted room and time. Let no man dread it. Yet, on the other hand, what is any man's autumn but a grim mockery, if there should be no inner harvest?"



"THE CHURCH AT WORK"

This morning as I stand in this holy place, I want to share with you as best I can some of the life and the spirit and the action of what took place in Atlantic City during the 22nd biennial convention of the United Lutheran Church in America. In a certain sense, I tell you at once, you were there. For when I went to this convention, I did not go simply as a delegate of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Maryland. I am the Pastor of Saint Luke Church, and I made it my business to take you there with me. I said to myself....I must be your conscience. I said to myself, as I sat there, listening to so much that went on... ..you must be by my side--I must see this thing through your eyes--I must hear this thing through your ears.....you were there.

Now let me tell you that as I sat there, I said to myself.....when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He called His disciple band, quite frequently, to the shores of Galilee....

.....and as He met with them, He talked with them about the Kingdom....

.....He outlined for them, as fully as He could, the things that He wanted them to do--and did they not, ever so frequently, come back to the quiet shores of Galilee to meet with their Master?

.....and after they had gone out preaching, they came back and they told Him about the results of their preaching.....

.....they had gone and performed some miracle, and they came back and they told Him about these wonderful things happening in the souls of people that they were privileged to touch.....

In the long, long ago, Jesus met with His disciples by the sands of the sea.

"The Church At Work" (2)

What took place, my friend, in Atlantic City, in the convention of the United Lutheran Church, can be referred to as a 20th-century adaptation of Jesus Christ meeting with a company of disciples by the sands of the sea, and getting from them a kind of progress report. And so the boards came, each in turn, and they talked about what they were doing for Jesus Christ. You'd have been thrilled, if you could have been there in the body and sat there with me, to hear some of the things that they had to say.

First of all, you would have been thrilled, my friend, with the dynamic personality of the man, under God, who is the President of our church.....never in my day have I seen such a giant in Jesus Christ as Franklin Clark Fry---a man of tremendous capability---a man who is totally committed to Jesus Christ. It could have been that you might have been one of 2,000-2500 people in that hall, and he might have been--so it seemed--far removed from you.....but just to be in the same room---one of 2500 people, perchance, with that man, and you begin to become dwarfed.....and you seem to shrink smaller and smaller as you stand in the shadow of that man---his dedication so complete---his talent and his skill so truly extraordinary. And then you say to yourself.....well, maybe he's a man with ten talents, and I am only a man with one. But don't ever overlook the fact....he's making the most of his ten talents---am I making the most of my one talent? This could have been your reaction, as you sat in the assembly, under the leadership of this able man---totally committed to Jesus Christ.

You'd have been thrilled when you would have listened to some of the reports, and then you might have said to yourself, as I said to myself....this, in a certain sense, is the church.....this is, permit the expression, as I heard the representatives of the Board of Foreign Missions, American Missions, Deaconess Work, Social Missions, Higher Education, Parish Education, and so on...

"The Church At Work" (3)

.....as I heard them give their report, I said to myself.....this is Saint Luke Church, Colesville Road and Highland Drive, Silver Spring---extended! Why, every Sunday morning, when the people--let me use the possessive pronoun just for the moment, advisedly--this is what's happening every Sunday morning when the people of my parish come to church.....

.....why, they're making prayers for the total cause of Jesus Christ in every area of endeavor---this is the result of their prayers!....  
.....why, every time they come to church, they bring their offering....  
it's dedicated on the altar--in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the work of Jesus Christ.....

When I heard what the Board of American Missions was doing....when I heard what the Board of Foreign Missions was doing....and so on.....I said to myself....why, this is Saint Luke Church---extended!...and 4,000-some other congregations. Do not make the mistake of ever allowing yourself to think for a single minute that this here, this hour, confined within these walls, is all there is to the church..  
....your marking the path that leads from your home to these red doors...spending one hour here....singing your hymns....praying your prayers....listening to your sermon....bringing your offering....receiving your benediction...and then going home.....this is all there is to the church! I saw you extended influence at work in many areas when I sat there in the convention hall.

Now these are the things that would also have brought you delight:

.....you'd have been pleased to learn that the Board of Parish Education is planning, not one year ahead, two years ahead, three years ahead....but planning any number of years ahead, to make sure that when these children being born today come into continuing impressionable years of their lives, that they shall

be taught adequately and well the true gospel of Jesus Christ...and they are corraling the finest minds and the best writers to prepare the material that you and I shall use as we nurture the souls of boys and girls.

.....you'd have been thrilled to discover that the Board of Social Missions, through its Department of Evangelism, could report that in the past biennial, over 200,000 souls through the Lutheran Church were claimed for Jesus Christ.....you would have been pleased to discover that there is a definite attempt on the part of our church to translate worship into work--to enable the membership of the congregation to know and to believe that the church is essentially the laity--not what takes place on a Sunday morning while a preacher is preaching...but the cause for Jesus Christ as it is being advanced by people who sit in the pews, as they go to their office and to their shop and to their desk, come Monday morning.....and to do that, a series of Faith and Life Institutes is being sponsored by our church--in which a lawyer...a doctor...a government employee--whatever you will....will be confronted with the fact: how am I translating Jesus Christ, not only in worship--but also where I work?

.....you'd have been pleased to discover that the Board of Social Missions says that a high percentage of those classified as retarded children are educable; and the church is in duty bound to offer them religious instruction. The church has made note of the fact that of a large number of schools for retarded children, only an infinitesimal percentage of them are offering any kind of religious instruction at all.....and the church says something must be done.....the church has been saying that something must be done for the alcoholic---something must be done for the aged. It was extremely gratifying to discover that years before now, the church had already taken her stand in behalf of human rights and social justice for all people.....and we simply

reminded ourselves of what previously we had said in behalf of Jesus Christ, who had an abiding passion for the souls of the underprivileged and the impoverished.

.....you'd have been pleased to discover that the church, in your behalf, has been wrestling with a statement on the use of nuclear weapons. We who live on the brink of total destruction--what does the church have to say? And then to learn---what joy you would have had in your heart.....to see a man like old Fred Nolde, Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the World Council of Churches, whose influence in the name of Jesus Christ is being felt definitely in many areas where political decisions must be made....one of our own...again a man of tremendous capability and total commitment.....completely realistic, and yet so firmly resolved that the voice of Jesus Christ can, should and must be heard.

.....you'd have been pleased to discover that when the Board of Foreign Missions made its report it was able to say that 31 men and women came forward in the past two years to give themselves completely to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in countries beyond our own shores.

.....and when the Board of American Missions made its report, what jubilation you might have known, when you would have learned that once every  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days a new congregation is being formed through the Lutheran Church to claim souls for Jesus Christ.....you would have known a measure of delight to learn that every 4 days title is being taken for a parsonage property, to prove to the community that the church is here in this area to stay, and a shepherd for souls will be a continuing presence in that community.....you'd have known delight when you would have been told that once every  $5\frac{1}{2}$  days a new first unit to house a growing congregation, at an expense of \$114,000, is being erected.

.....you'd have known great delight when on October 14 at 11:00 o'clock in the morning the convention took action which now creates, pending the approval of the synods of the United Lutheran Church, the new Lutheran Church in America.

.....you'd have been pleased when the Board of Deaconess Work brought in its report, reminding us that in the past two years, through a program which they had sponsored, <sup>51</sup>84 women gave a year of their lives, without salary, to assisting in the work of Jesus Christ.....all they said was--"I want to be of help--every day--bringing my total life to bear as a witness....and all I ask from the church is that they give me a roof over my head and spread me a table." Every now and then we've taken a back seat when we discovered that there had been other denominations who've challenged men to give two years of their lives in behalf of their religious truth as they see it and understand it. Here was a thrilling thing---to know that this was happening--in our church. And then there was someone who stood up on the floor of the convention and said....."Why not make a study and make this available to young people, who perhaps after they finished their college education, or if they don't go to college, might be willing to give a year of their lives to Kingdom work?.....how about men?.....in later years--who might welcome such an opportunity....".....these are the things that would have thrilled you!

This is not the whole story. There are some things that would have pricked your conscience...and, under God, I am constrained to share them with you:

.....you'd have been disturbed, and rightfully so, to learn that the population of the unchurched is increasing a million each year....you'd have been disturbed to learn that the church is not keeping up, in its growth, with the population increase.....

.....you'd have been disturbed to learn that of the 200,000 souls claimed for Jesus Christ through the Lutheran Church in the past two years, almost the

same number were lost to the Lutheran Church--to Jesus Christ.

.....it would not have brought much elation to you to discover that across these 4,000-some congregations of our beloved church, when we tallied up our net gain, we were able to say to Jesus Christ....."and all we have to show you now, at the end of a year, is just 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % increase...."

.....it would have pricked your conscience, wouldn't it now?--to have been told as you read from the reports that for the first time since World War II we have had a decline in Sunday School enrollment.....when we can't build public schools fast enough...when the public school is going on split sessions--the Sunday School enrollment has known a decline.

.....and whatever jubilation you might have known in considering the statistic that 31 men and women became missionaries in two years time, it would have passed very quickly, for you should have said also....."only 31?---out of 4,000 congregations!.....is this all we have to offer our Lord and Saviour?

.....you might have had the same sobering statistic if you dealt with men for the ministry and young women for the diaconate---only 130 deaconesses throughout the United Lutheran Church in America---this wonderful opportunity by which to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.//.....these are the things that you would have felt and these are the things you would have experienced.

Now, rightfully, I said to myself.....where does Saint Luke Church fit in- to this picture?.....three services on a Sunday morning.....two Sunday School sessions.....knowing the substantial increase in membership each year.....I would hesitate, right now, to take the X-ray of God and set Saint Luke Church over against the total population of this area---and our increase might not be as substantial as you would think!

So I say to myself.....whatever joy I would share with the United Lutheran

Church in convention.....that's one thing.....but I have no right to take my church to task at long range and say--"You are to blame---to lose throughout the United States, 200,000 members a year---to have no more than 31 become missionaries" .....so I say to myself.....

.....how many of them became missionaries because of my witness for Jesus Christ?

.....how many of the 200,000 joined because of my witness to Jesus Christ?  
.....I say to myself.....

.....how many more might have joined if I would have been more fervent in spirit?

.....how many more people might have gone into the foreign field, had I taught a Sunday School class and laid this burden upon those that I would teach?

and then when they told me that the only thing that's holding back the Board of American Missions is the fact that we haven't enough money to cope with the responsibility of the work.....

.....when they told me that this is the day for urbanization--that 60-some percent of the people now live on only 1% of the land--and the church at the heart of the city is withering.....

.....when they told me that the American Negro is going toward the city--that in New York City alone, the negro population is almost one million--almost one-half million in Washington, the District of Columbia ...when they cite for me statistic for St. Louis, Detroit, Philadelphia ...and when I remembered that our church is not doing enough for the church at the heart of the city--not doing enough to evangelize those who find the cause of Jesus Christ as a vacuum....

.....these things disturb me and prick my conscience.....



It's a delightful thing to walk by the side of the sea.....to be calmed by even the thunderous roll of the ocean....and to think that you can sleep easily when the roll of the ocean puts you to sleep.....but there were nights when I did not sleep easily, because I said to myself.....

.....some day I shall stand for the last progress report before my Maker--

by the shore of the Eternal Sea....and He shall ask me.....

..... "What have you been doing for the Kingdom?".....and if I had to give Him a report that isn't as good as this report....or even if it were a little bit better....I would find myself sorely chastized.

What is the church? You are the church, my friend! These joys---these perplexities.....they're yours! Time for some people is running out. Let us make wise use of whatever time remains. Do not let it be said that we were the people who forged what now looks like a possibility.....the post-Christian era.

"THE TRUE TREASURE OF THE CHURCH"

The sermon on this Reformation Sunday is entitled "The True Treasure of the Church" and the text is the 6th verse of the 3rd chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And then Peter said unto him, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

The beggar had gone there day after day. He'd been crippled for a long, long time, and his friends would bring him to this choice spot in the shadow of the temple; for surely if people were inclined to be generous, they might be generous near God's House. He thought he had an excellent spot, and he'd wait there, always with a quick eye for any man who seemed to have a fat pocket-book. Just what his impression was when he saw Peter, I don't know, but, at any rate, he was willing to chance it when Peter came, and he cried out to Peter for an alms....."Give me!.....give me!...something!"

Peter's answer is classic: "Silver and gold I don't have, but what I do have, I'm going to give to you."

Now it doesn't make much difference if Peter had been a millionaire..... Suppose he had given out of his great substance, something to the beggar. It would only have tided him over another day, perhaps another week. He would still have remained a beggar. His basic need would have gone on unsatisfied. Peter, thank God! was able to say, "It isn't silver and gold that I'm going to give you, but I have something else that I will give: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk." And at the mention of the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the man took on newness of life. He was transformed....he was no longer a cripple....he was

"The True Treasure of the Church" (2)

no longer a beggar.....he received new life. This was the priceless gift that the Apostle Peter could offer. And down through the years, this has been the priceless gem of the Christian church.

On this Reformation Sunday I remind you--this is the true treasure of the Christian church: to be able to say to men.....Jesus Christ!....Jesus Christ! .....know Him!....love Him!....serve Him!.....and your life will be transformed. To this end, the Christian church exists...This is her specialty...This is her greatest single asset---the treasure that she has in Jesus Christ.

But unfortunately, the church has not always treasured her true treasure. There have been times in the history of the church when she has allowed herself to become corrupt---corrupt, because she has put a greater value on some other things than Jesus Christ. Please don't misunderstand me--I haven't the slightest desire to come to this sacred desk this morning to have a quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church. I'm not at all interested in hurling brickbats at any other person who might take the name of Jesus Christ, whatever other denominational label he may choose for himself. In a day such as ours, when Christianity must fight for her life--when Christianity is entering a period which sometimes is being referred to as the "Post-Christian Era", she shouldn't spend too much of her time throwing brickbats at other Christians. I haven't the slightest interest in that right now.

But as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, under God I stand here right now, to charge any man who takes the name of Christian, be he Quaker or Roman Catholic....Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian or Lutheran..... are you treasuring the real treasure of the church, which is Jesus Christ?...are you keeping pre-eminent in your life and in your spirit, allegiance to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world?....does He permeate all that you do?

In the motion picture, "Martin Luther," there is a great moment when there is brought to the Church of All Saints, also known as the Castle Church of Wittenberg, a number of very, very precious things, and they are going to be put on display on All Saints' Day, in that church. Devout people in that parish are lead to believe that if they come and perform some act of veneration where one of these relics of the church is on display, there will be guaranteed to them, merit, which will assure them salvation.

Martin Luther stands there greatly disturbed. A venerable father of the church is showing these relics. And then Martin Luther storms out of the room, righteously indignant, because there seems to prevail the feeling that this is a treasure of the church. Martin Luther also remembers that close by Wittenberg there had come a representative of the church, selling pieces of paper, granted for a certain sum of money; the piece of paper would assure a man that his sins were forgiven.....and the proceeds from the sale of the indulgences would go to complete what is, I dare say, the most magnificent of all churches in Christendom--St. Peter's in Rome.

Now, wait a minute, my ffiend, there's nothing wrong in building a church, and they should be built magnificently. This House of God which we call Saint Luke Church, here on the corner of Colesville Road and Highland Drive, should always be kept clean, in order and in good taste. No single home in this parish, in a certain sense, should reflect greater care and greater concern than what should be given to this house of prayer--God's House. There's nothing wrong in building churches....there is nothing wrong in building churches magnificently---God deserves our finest and our best, and even brick and mortar and stained glass can become a symbol of our devotion to God.

Now there's nothing wrong, either, in remembering those who have departed this life in the Christian faith. I'm not so sure that you could build up a really

## "The True Treasure of the Church" (4)

good case to take people to task for treasuring, in a certain sense, a lock of hair from a devout woman who sacrificed her life for Jesus Christ. Can there be anything wrong in remembering, even using tangible things, to recall to our mind, how other people gave their lives for Jesus Christ, tortured to their death as they were. I'm not so sure that we make enough of those who are the saints in God's Kingdom. I would take anyone to task who passes by All Saints' Day very lightly, as though we had no right to pay tribute to those who died with the name of Jesus upon their hearts. There's nothing wrong in remembering saints. There's nothing wrong in building churches.....but...if one makes this the primary business of the church....if one allows a church structure to become his treasure.. ...if one allows simply veneration of a pious woman, even though she may be referred to as the mother of God, to be the substitute for his own dedication and piety, this is making something other than Jesus Christ the true treasure of the church.

That's why Martin Luther took issue with his church. There was veneration before the relics...men went their way and sinned tomorrow as they had sinned yesterday; a man went and bought a piece of paper, the money for which would help build magnificent St. Peter's in Rome, only to lie in the gutter clutching the piece of paper under his coat in a drunken stupor. To build a church but to remain in sin?....this is not to make Jesus Christ the true treasure.

What do you consider the treasure of Saint Luke Church. I keep my ear to the ground--I hear people talk. A visitor comes to town...it's a perfectly fine thing that you should want to show him Saint Luke Church, and so you bring him here; and you show him the Chapel of the Grateful Heart; and you talk about the Christian Education unit.....this is an important part of Saint Luke Church, but this is not our true treasure.

I went to the convention of the church in Atlantic City....I heard men talk

"The True Treasure of the Church" (5)

about their youth programs....I heard them talk about their ministries of music...  
..I heard them talk about their Christian education enterprise....they talked about  
programming....they talked about staff....they talked about facilities.....  
these are important in the on-going work of the Kingdom.....this is not the true  
treasure. The true treasure is Jesus Christ--alive in the hearts and souls of men  
and women.

I visited the Church of Our Lady--that wonderful Notre Dame Cathedral in  
Paris....my friend said to me.."Look at the rose window--isn't it precious?".....  
..my friend said to me.."Your may be fortunate enough--I think it's on display  
now"....and then he took me over to the side of the nave of that great place of  
worship--yes, it was open--a keeper in the cathedral was showing to those who'd  
come and perform some act of veneration, a relic of the church....and my friend  
said to me.."This is a wonderful treasure of the church!"

I came back later in the day....some forty priests, I think, were chanting  
Vespers. I don't think I've ever heard anything quite like it--the sound of forty  
male voices arising heavenward in praise to God....and I suppose if my friend would  
have been there, he would have said.."Isn't it precious?" But when I turned my  
back upon the altar of Notre Dame in Paris, I carried in my mind and in my spirit  
something that I called precious.....it wasn't a rose window...it wasn't the  
chanting of forty priests...it wasn't a relic.....but when I had been there  
waiting during the Vesper hour, I heard a woman, in almost hysterical fashion,  
sobbing her heart out--what the burden of her soul was, I did not know....but I  
saw a kindly gracious person go over and put her arms around that sobbing sinner,  
sit alongside of her, and then walk with her, hand in hand, out into the dirty  
streets of Paris.....and I said to myself.....this is the treasure--a Christ-  
committed soul, giving new hope, new life, to a sinner.

## "The True Treasure of the Church" (6)

This morning at 11:00 o'clock, in the hour of worship that follows this one, we shall receive again another group of new members in this Family of God. Please do not misunderstand me.....I wonder what brings them to Saint Luke Church. I use that figure of speech advisedly. Some have a way of allowing me to believe that they come because they find something meaningful in this ordered dignity that we call worship. Some there are who come because they've heard that this is a church with an accent upon all phases of work that should be done for the Kingdom and they know a special delight in knowing that they can bring their children here safely, for Christian education, for youth fellowship and for the ministry of music...someone has told them.. "Now we have seven choirs in the process of training and development--260 people enrolled in that program."

But I say to myself.....is this reason enough to make a person want to become a member of this parish?....is this the treasure of this congregation?--this lovely church building?--this necessary church program? Important!...but I would be thrilled, and I would know a measure of joy in my heart, when a person would come to me and say..."I want to become a member of Saint Luke Church because I have found in your people---Jesus Christ." Then I would say to myself.. ....you have found our true treasure---this is our only reason for existing!--- --to share with people....Jesus Christ.

This is not an easy day in the era of the Christian religion. She is coming on a difficult chapter in her history. And if she ever falls short, it will be for the very simple reason that the church has lost her treasure---Jesus Christ. Lost Him?...because there's only one place where He's to be kept---not within the walls of a church....He's to be kept in the heart and soul of an individual. It was when Peter was able to say to the beggar.."In the name of Jesus, get up and walk," Jesus came to that beggar because He was first in the heart, the soul, the mind and the spirit of the Apostle Peter. What is the true treasure of the church? It should be found in your heart. And if it isn't there, God have mercy upon us!

"THE DEVIL'S SIEVE"

The sermon is entitled, "The Devil's Sieve", and the text from the 22nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the 31st and 32nd verses:

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:  
But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Goodness just doesn't happen automatically. Nor can it be said that once it does occur to a man, that it just naturally perpetuates itself. This was the lesson that Jesus was trying to drive home into the hearts and minds of His disciples. For three years they had been in His company--they felt safe, they felt secure. Now the time had come when He was about to leave this present world and to return to heaven. Whatever anxiety they might have known was quickly dispelled when He told them that in heaven there would be a kind of table, and His disciples would be able to sit with Him at that table. And furthermore, He made them a promise, that when they would all get to heaven together, He would permit them to help Him--in fact He made this explicit...."You'll be able to judge with Me the twelve tribes of Israel." How pleasantly they must have looked at each other. How satisfied! They had it made! This was what was going to happen to them!

Then Jesus turned and looked one of them straight in the eye and called him by name, and said something rather very disturbing....."Simon, the devil wants you, and he's going to sift you like man sifts wheat.....but, Simon, I'm going to pray for you....and, Simon, when you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

Now let me, as best I can, tell you exactly what that passage of Scripture



could mean. Goodness never happens automatically; and once a man thinks he may have it, it doesn't follow that it naturally perpetuates itself. "Simon, to you and the rest of the disciples I'm making a promise---heaven belongs to you, and I want you to know it and to experience it.....and when you get to heaven, everything that I have I am going to share with you.....but, in the meantime, Simon, don't ever permit yourself to think that you've got it made! .....for as long as you live, the devil has your name on his list."

This is a troublesome thing for some people. And they hesitate to believe that even Jesus Christ would use the name Satan in His vocabulary. Please don't misunderstand me when I put it to you this way: Jesus just didn't live here for three years without finding out some things about you and me. Jesus, Who knows the hearts of men and tries their minds, knows that as long as we are within this present world, there is this sifting and this sorting of men. It's always going on. Life, itself, is a sifting process. And as long as these men were here on earth, this sorting, even on the part of the devil, would be taking place. They could not escape it.

Captain Scott, who made his last journey to the Antarctic in 1912, kept a very interesting diary--perhaps through this diary he has contributed to us a great insight into the mind and spirit of a most remarkable man. Mark you, a band of them, only a handful of picked people on the great exploration--they had to be giants to begin with--this was no ordinary ordeal or experiment; you had only to read one page after another, in order to discover what a tremendous thing this was.....and in his diary, Captain Scott admits---giants and carefully picked men as they were, the sorting and the sifting process soon took place. Against all the trials and tribulations which came in such an inevitable fashion, eventually each man began to show himself for exactly what he was.

Life is constantly a sifting and a sorting process. Some of us are called

"The Devil's Sieve" (3)

upon to conduct group meetings.....

.....sometimes it's a session of the Church Council.....

.....sometimes it's teaching a Sunday School class.....

.....sometimes it's chaperoning a group of youngsters in the Canteen  
in Bieber Hall.....

.....sometimes it's sending out an invitation to people to attend a  
meeting.....

.....sometimes it's only making an announcement about something.....

and for some folks who have dealt long enough with people, they discover very easily that even a reaction to any one of these things is inevitably a sorting and a sifting of people. They react favorably, unfavorably, or with indifference. It seems to show right down the line. Men have a way of exposing them to life itself. And then every now and then when a kind of opposition arises, it's the opposition--it could be sickness, it could be sorrow, it could be disappointment, it could be failure to get 'my way'....but at any time when opposition raises its head, we are tried, we are tested....and the sifting and the sorting process takes place, as long as we live.

I am convinced that if I were to make a study about the devil---and what an intriguing study it could be! ... that this picture of the devil given to us by Jesus Himself, as someone holding a sieve in his hand, is far more meaningful than the conventional picture of Satan, with a pitchfork. For maybe it could be said that the devil doesn't have to go after people....the devil can be content to bide his time--he simply waits...and let life itself be the test, and he gets, very naturally, what comes his way. Maybe after it's all said and done, that the devil doesn't have to do battle for your soul. You may just very easily and naturally gravitate in his direction; and he just moves in at the right time!

"The Devil's Sieve" (4)

This was the kind of thing that Jesus was greatly concerned about with the soul of Simon Peter...and all who are made of the same stuff as Simon Peter. ...."Simon, the devil wants you, and if he ever gets you, he's going to get you just because he's going to sift you, and you'll either fall toward him or you'll be able to withstand him." This is a parable of life.

One of the most significant television plays that I've ever witnessed was a story, oddly enough, that carried the title, "Shadow of the Devil." It was the story of a woman who had lived a very wicked life, but thanks be to God, she had met a pure person; and the very basic integrity of this character helped to change that woman's life; and in the development of the story, you ascertain very easily what great joy she knows in her heart, thinking now that her past is over, and if I may say, once she had looked in the general direction of God. She permitted herself to think that she had it made--that goodness just naturally would perpetuate itself. But the awesome discovery that she had to make was this...that even though she had committed herself, now, to all that was decent and right and honorable, every single day that she lived, she still had to have her bout with the devil!...he was always within reach....there is always the attractive head of temptation, in one way or another. The play has it that she barely gets through the gates of Paradise--she barely makes it! ....and haunting her, even to the very day that she dies, is the lengthened shadow of the devil, cast against her. This, too, is a parable of life.

For goodness can have no meaning if it happens automatically. Your halo has no value, if it's just dropped upon your head, and you have no concern as to whether it's there or it isn't there; and if perchance you should lose it, you should have no inclination to reach into the dust and to shake off the dirt and to try to put it back on. If you've never put it this way before, you have a right to put it this way.....Jesus is the supreme realist--He knows exactly what you and I have to face

here on this earth; so in one of His parting messages, He says to Simon Peter....  
..."You don't have it made....I'll keep my promise, but every single day that passes, you could run the chance of losing ground."

If I were ever to take people to task who indoctrinated me in the Christian faith--if I were ever to take my parents to task--my Sunday School teacher--my pastor .....and God knows I don't want to do it---I'm far more in their debt than I will ever be able to repay it.....but it's been one area that was sadly neglected in the impressionable days of my years---and that was the lesson that Jesus was teaching Simon Peter.....you'll have to do business with the devil--and just because you commit yourself to Jesus Christ, it doesn't follow automatically that you have it made from that moment on!

Now you and I have a right to make several deductions from this text. The first is this: that Jesus Christ calls the devil by name....and goes on record that there is in this world this force of evil that is eager and willing to draw a man back from that which is good.

The second thing is this: Jesus implies in this text that the devil will have his moments, and even a child of God will fail! - - this is Jesus telling us this.....this is the implication which you get when you read this word when He says.. ...."but when thou art converted". You and I will give the devil his time of the day! You and I will serve Him! But to fail once--to fail twice....in the Name of Jesus Christ, it doesn't naturally follow that we should go on failing forever. And the reason is this: Jesus says....."Simon" -- (and you can use your own name in place of Simon, because He had you in mind at the same time)....."I'm going to pray for you--through all of your testing--through all of your trials....I will pray for you." .....because this is happening---that's why you and I can be assured that we need not be eternally damned. For Satan trembles when he sees even the weakest saint on his knees.....and if that can be true because of the prayers that you and I make in behalf

"The Devil's Sieve" (6)

of ourselves, think what must be happening when Jesus Christ, sitting at the right hand of God in Heaven above, is making intercession for you and for me.

There was a woman once, by the name of Monica, who kept praying constantly and daily for her son, Augustine--that he would be saved, and he might be able to withstand the work of the devil.....this great father of the church--transformed and converted through the effective prayers of a woman, his mother.

The devil has your name on his calling list--he'll make a field day of some of our lives.....but Jesus Christ says it doesn't have to stop there...."My prayers in your behalf will eventually win the day; when that happens, and when you know it, then you go and you strengthen your brother."

Have you known the flush of victory yet, my friend?...have you ever, for a single day, known what it was to give the devil his marching orders? - - then pass the word along---give hope and courage to somebody else!

"Simon, the devil desires to have you, and he's going to sift you like wheat.....but, Simon, I'm going to pray for you, and when you're converted, you strengthen somebody else." The greatest warrior for Jesus Christ is the man who has the battle scars from his bout with the devil. Take heart, weary one, take heart! The time of temptation can pass. By the grace of God, you can become victorious!

"ADVICE TO A CONGREGATION"

As night after night I came to Bieber Hall this past week, to share with the people of this parish something of the genuine spirit of this congregation, I followed through the next morning by reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the kind of thing that I felt Paul would be thinking about if he were privileged to visit Saint Luke Church; and I have been haunted by his words and therefore I'm constrained to set aside the sermon that I had been preparing, and I'd much rather talk to you this morning, as the burden of the Lord is laid upon me, upon a sermon that bears the title, "Advice to a Congregation"; and the text, using the J. B. Phillips translation, the 10th verse of the 8th chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the church at Corinth:

"Here is my opinion in the matter. I think it would be a good thing for you who were the first a year ago to think of helping, as well as the first to give, to carry through what you then intended to do."

As I read these words of the Apostle Paul, I cannot help but think that he was counting and weighing his words very, very carefully. Paul, you see, was that wonderful person who went abroad in Asia Minor establishing new congregations, and he had the thrill of seeing a congregation grow and develop. He came as a father in the faith and he'd talk with them and he'd reason with them; and if they had a problem or two, they'd send them on their way to Missionary-Superintendent, Paul.

Well sometimes when he was with the congregation, he could guide them a great deal, but his concern for the congregation continued, even though he wasn't on the site. And that's why, when you read the New Testament, a good share of the New Testament is made up of a number of letters that Paul wrote back to these places that he had visited--he couldn't get them out of his mind, and he had a continu-

"Advice to a Congregation" (2)

ing concern for them. And so he'd give them a bit of advice and he'd give them some counsel.

Now, it's not always easy to give advice and counsel when you write a letter--it's much easier to do it when you're there in person. And lo and behold! Paul discovered that the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians, some of the people didn't quite understand and they were a bit irritated and annoyed; and this bothered Paul, because he was afraid that if they were irritated, they would fail to get the intent of the thing that he wanted them to know. And when you and I ever run the risk of becoming irritated, we ought to take ourselves to task, lest in our own personal reaction we miss something that's far bigger than our own particular reaction of the moment.

So Paul, loving these Christians at Corinth, writes them a second letter. He doesn't say that he's entirely sorry for what he has said. But he does say that he's aware of the fact that they didn't completely understand and they were annoyed. So Paul, in his second letter, starts speaking to them again. And I suppose that's why he weighs his words so carefully. Maybe that's why he says...."In my opinion",--- he was very, very careful that, in this thing that meant so much to him, he didn't give them the impression that he was jamming it down their throats or driving it through their heads. He was simply going to testify to the thing as he knew it; he would hope the sweet reasonableness would find a kind of hearing in their souls--that something of the basic integrity in them would not help but respond.

So he began to talk to them and he gave them advice, my friend, that's just as timely as though St. Paul had paid a visit to this parish in Silver Spring. And as far as this section of his letter to the church at Corinth is concerned, it might just as well have been "To All You Christians in Saint Luke Lutheran Church, Colesville Road, Highland Drive....this is my opinion:" Let me read the text again

for you:

"Here is my opinion in the matter. I think it would be a good thing for you who were the first a year ago to think of helping, as well as the first to give, to carry through what you then intended to do."

Now this is precisely what's been happening this week. We had the wonderful satisfaction of getting first-hand reports from something that we've been the first to do. It was last year about this time, you may remember, when as a congregation we took that very noble stand, and said that we were going to set aside five years of our history, between our 20th and 25th anniversaries, to thank God for the blessings we've enjoyed, and then to prove in a very certain way that we mean what we say and we want other people to benefit from our gratitude.

And some of the things we decided to do last year, so nobly, was to do for the Lutheran Inner Mission Society something that they would be able to do, perhaps for the first time in their history. We've followed the same line, the same reasoning, with the Council of Churches. And when it came to Saint Luke Church, we're able to do the same thing here, too; in a particular area of our life, to do something the like of which we had never done before. So the Apostle Paul, you see, could just as well be standing here right now, saying to us...."in my opinion, it's wonderful that you began to do something that you'd never done before, and in my opinion, I encourage you to keep it up."

This past week we heard Chaplain Piper....Louise Dillow....Dr. Orso--tell us about a certain something that's being done through the Lutheran Inner Mission Society that's never been done before, because Saint Luke Church, last year, did something---began to do something---that had never been done before.

Charlie Alston, that dedicated---you could almost call him a "saint in ebony" ....you couldn't be in his presence without being made aware of his total commitment to Christ---told us how, for the first time, here in this National Capital



"Advice to a Congregation" (4)

Area, juveniles, caught in the web of crime, are having the name of Jesus Christ brought to them. Why? -- because last year, for the first time, Saint Luke Church decided to do something, the like of which she had never done before, and therefore this kind of ministry is being done because it's possible, where it was not possible before.

You among us, having been present these four nights in Bieber Hall, and having heard one of our own young people stand up, with eloquence of soul, holding their own as magnificently as any of the other people who spoke in the name of Jesus Christ, and everyone in his own way, being fairly typical of a large number of young people in this parish who are having a greater claim made upon them in the name of Jesus Christ than has happened heretofore.

Now if Paul were here, Paul would say, "This is a wonderful thing you've started to do....I commend you for it!....keep it up!....continue it!" Now Paul never gave any advice without being able to back it up. And when I continue to read his Second Letter to the Corinthians, I am amazed at his reasonableness. He's encouraging the Christians at Corinth to go on doing some good work, and to show that they mean it by bringing their contributions. And then he gives them their reasons for it---he lists four or five.

One of the reasons, he says..."you ought not to forget that there are other people in this world who have needs." That man Paul....mind you, when he went from one ~~congregation~~ congregation to another, he didn't say, "Now assemble all your deacons and elders and all the leaders of the parish organizations--sit down with me--look at a blue-print for your own parish---let us find out all the things that you need and let us look to your parish and your parish alone....", while this was a mighty important thing for Paul, but do you know what he did? Everywhere he went, he talked, not only about the needs of that congregation, but he said....."Do you mind if I tell you about the needs of the people at Thessalonica?....you should have been with

me in Galatia.....do you mind if I tell you something about Macedonia?....." wherever he saw spiritually or physically impoverished people, he couldn't keep quiet, and he kept telling other people about those needs.

And I think if the Apostle Paul had been here last year, he would have been thrilled to high heaven to know that this congregation, when she was thinking of her next five years, would also think very definitely about the needs that Charlie Alston's meeting in these juvenile institutions. When you think of how someone steps in when a home is being broken---well that's one reason why the Apostle Paul said that the Christians in Corinth, when they came to church, should not come empty-handed...."there are other people's needs that ought to be met, too, and out of whatever you have, remember them." Do you know that in the old Jewish church, when the Feast of Purim was being observed, no one was ever allowed to come to the feast celebration, no matter how poor he was, without remembering somebody else who was worse off than he. Hop, skip and jump as the Apostle Paul would from one congregation to another, he kept telling other people..."If you don't mind, give a little bit more to meet the needs of others who have less than you."

And he also said, "When you do bring your offering"....remember now, this is a man who is weighing his words carefully ..... "do it when you remember Jesus Christ." ..... "Do you know what Jesus Christ gave up?" says the Apostle Paul--- take his word for it, not mine.....the Apostle Paul said, "Do you realize that Jesus Christ gave up Heaven to come to earth--to be here with you....He turned His back upon eternal bliss, to come down here to identify Himself with all the misery of your wickedness. His whole life was a sacrifice, and He came here to do it for you--every single sinner.....and you remember that--and don't forget it....", says the Apostle Paul, "when the work of the Lord and its support is at stake." An amazing man!

He also gave them this reason for supporting the Lord's work through their church. He said....."Remember what other Christians have done....".....and then in this letter to the Corinthians he talks about the record of the Macedonians. May I say this to you....that five years ago this month, when I felt the Holy Spirit guiding me to Saint Luke Church, I came and paid a visit to this congregation. You were not here---it wasn't on a Sunday.....but when I knelt in prayer, here, the first time I ever visited this Nave, I thanked God for what surrounded me, because I could hardly believe my eyes, that this congregation--it was only fifteen years old then--had come so far, so soon. Almost incredible!-- Only three people attended the first meeting that Dr. Bieber, the Mission-developer, called....and out of that disappointment -- yet never to be deterred was Milton Bieber, and I dare say those three men who came to meet with him....out of that, are you - and our future.

I've been told, and properly so, that for at least the first five or six years of the history of this congregation, other Christians were picking up the tab, underwriting a great cost of this congregation.....that this parish could never have been begun if it had not been because of the generosity of Christians somewhere else. Now, says the Apostle Paul....."Think of their record, and how you benefit from it.....and whenever you give, give gratefully to God; for what does a man have that he hasn't received?....all of us are debtors."

And then the Apostle Paul, who had these terrific insights into human nature, also suggested people ought to give to support the Lord's work because every now and then they get a noble feeling, and then they ought to back that noble feeling up. To wit:

.....you say---young people should be saved for Jesus Christ! Well how are you going to save young people for Jesus Christ?---unless somebody plans a program, and somebody directs it----it's reached that magnitude now.....

.....what are you going to do for the three hundred young

people in Saint Luke Church? You say something ought to be done, and this is a noble impulse on your part....but when you back up that noble impulse, Saint Luke Church is able to call a full-time Director of Youth Work.....

.....had you been here at 8:30....60 to 70, 75 boys and girls sang praise to Jesus Christ---the regular 8:30 teen-age choir, and then 40--some boys who sang for the first time this fall and winter season. You want to touch them for Jesus Christ? You want to claim them?--who come within the confines of your parish? You have the noble impulse to see that it's done? This is one way by which we follow through on your noble impulse.....and so we have a Choirmaster and Organist who is able to guide---to train---to share Jesus Christ....with 260 people in this congregation.....

.....we read in the paper about a broken home---if only something could be done for this child!---who is going to take care of the child?--you know something ought to be done---you can't go down into certain areas of the Washington district and do it.....but because you have a noble impulse and you want it to be done, Louise Dillow and Chaplain Piper and Dr. Orso and all of his staff are there, following through on your noble impulse.

.....Charlie Alston, sitting down and talking with a boy who has pumped bullets into another youngster, and who has never been confronted by Jesus Christ!.....every time Charlie Alston meets a youngster like that, he is able to do it because you had a noble impulse, and you backed it up!

And then the last of all of his reasons---knowing human nature as he did, but he saved it till the last....the Apostle Paul, in that Second Letter to the

"Advice to a Congregation" (8)

Corinthians, says something about....."Well, don't forget this, too....whenever something is done in God's name, for the good of somebody else, everybody benefits. And you, too, get some kind of benefit from the good that you do." Please don't misunderstand me and don't make more of this than you should, but this church stands to benefit immeasurably, in many ways, through a full-time Director of Youth Work... ..through a full-time Choirmaster and Organist....through someone to guide them in the program of Christian Education.....through a Parish Deaconess, who sits down and counsels with people, and especially those who never get a chance to see the inside of this church.....

The wonderful spirit and good will that is Saint Luke Church just doesn't happen.....it's the result of many kinds of investment. And who knows, my friend.... that precious teen-age daughter of yours could be saved a very embarrassing thing in her life, because somewhere, even though it seems insignificant, a chaplain, in the name of Jesus Christ, is able to see a boy redeemed, even though he's had his first bout with crime.

This is Paul's advice to a congregation. It's as timely as the present moment. He didn't jam it down their throats---he didn't drive it through their heads.....he just believed in it so intently that he had to say it, and he trusted the basic integrity of the people to believe it:

"Here is my opinion in the matter. I think it would be a good thing for you who were the first a year ago to think of helping, as well as the first to give, to carry through what you've begun."

Now this is the meaning of today, in Saint Luke Church.

"THAT WE SHOULD BE SAVED"

The title for this sermon on the first Sunday in Advent is found in the words of the text, from the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the 71st verse:

"That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us."

What happens to a man who has a great moment before God? Separated from the rest of the world, he is carried on the wings of ecstasy into the pure presence of the Eternal God. Well, Luke tells us what happened to one man who had an experience like that. The old man had the interesting name of Zacharias. He was a man who delighted in serving God as a priest in the temple, a man given to devout things. And once when he was serving God in the temple, he was carried away--God spoke to him. There was no question about it. The experience was so tremendous that Zacharias could not speak. After a period of speechlessness, his lips were again unsealed. And when he told people what had happened to him, he found himself eventually singing God's praise.

Now, how does a man talk who has had this direct encounter with God? Let me read for you the words of the Benedictus....this is the song of Zacharias....this is the way he tells about his reaction to what had happened to him:

"And Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,  
Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,  
And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;  
As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:  
That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;  
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

"That We Should Be Saved" (2)

The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,  
That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered  
out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without  
fear,  
In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days  
of our life.  
And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the  
Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord  
to prepare his ways;  
To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the  
remission of their sins,  
Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-  
spring from on high hath visited us,  
To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the  
shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Now, that's the way Zacharias reacted. And what was he saying?  
What do these words mean? Let me tell you as best I can.

First of all, Zacharias, having had an encounter with God, had  
indelibly marked upon the fabric of his mind that God is someone who  
remembers the promises that He makes. Zacharias said..."Why, when I  
stood in front of God, God wanted me to know that everything that He  
had promised me, He had fulfilled. God is The Great One who keeps  
His promises....and God made promises to the children of Israel be-  
fore our day.....

.....God promised us that He would never forget us....

.....God promised us that He would watch over us....

.....God promised us that in the time of trouble He  
would deliver us....."

....that's the first thing that Zacharias had to tell people....

....."This is the truth that came to me when I saw God face to face."  
Well, that's an excellent point at which to begin, because this gives  
one an insight into the basic character of God. He does not go back  
on any good promise that God makes to His people. Integrity becomes  
our God.

And then Zacharias, if I can evaluate this song of his for you, goes on to say something else. He said,.....

"This God, who is the God of all the people, and this God who has chosen us Israelites---He goes on thinking about us, and He has an abiding concern for us; and one day He's going to come and visit us in person!"

.....maybe I'd better repeat that, and when I do, suppose you listen to it as though you had never heard it before, for we commit a grievous error in allowing these tremendous truths to just slide off of our tongue--go in one ear and out the other.....Zacharias said....

"This God who is in the heaven above--He's going to come to earth sometime, and God himself is going to pay us a visit."

"Can you imagine anything like that? God coming down here to earth? God, now, after thousands of years--sending somebody else to represent Him.....God himself is going to visit our weary, sin-stained earth!?"

Well it's just because the old Jews couldn't picture anything like this, they failed to see Him when He came. The Jews thought it was blasphemy to think in terms of God coming in the form of a man, for man is by nature sinful, and this world itself is ugly; and they couldn't quite picture a God who would stoop as low as all this--they couldn't quite picture a God who would come to something beneath His dignity. They could think of a God far removed--high--lifted up--in awe and in majesty.....but a God who would humble himself and come down to earth, and take upon himself the form of a man--this they couldn't quite comprehend. And that's one reason why they rejected Him. They refused to believe that what God was saying could be true.



Don't let that happen to you, my friend, and if it should happen, you'll miss the whole meaning of the Advent season, because Advent, if it's anything at all, it's a time when we try to get through these thick skulls of ours---these ugly hearts---that GOD is going to come to earth again.

The third thing that Zacharias says in this tremendous proclamation of his:....well, when God does come to earth, He's going to concern himself with the only thing that's really important to Him. And what do you suppose that is? Salvation. Salvation is God's specialty....and God won't fritter away His time dealing with incidentals and the insignificant. If God comes to earth, God's going to concern himself with the business at hand, and the business at hand is the salvation of men from their sins.

Zacharias says...."He's coming to earth, that we should be saved".....Zacharias had it definitely set in his mind that the basic intention of God is that people should not go to hell--the basic intention of God is that people should be saved. And if God can't get this through to us in any other way, He'll come himself and set us straight; and if it's His hand that's necessary to grasp us from the clutch of the devil, and this is what we want most, then God says... .."I'm going to do it." - - That's the meaning of the text--that we should be saved.....and one doesn't really read this word of the text until he sees it as the basic intention of God.....to perform His specialty--the salvation of His children.

But alas and alack!--~~they~~ this is the thing that so many of us concern ourselves with least. This is one reason why Jesus Christ, for most people, is completely irrelevant--they do not see themselves as

"That We Should Be Saved" (5)

sinners.....they do not stand in need of salvation. If a man does not see himself as a sinner, he needs no Saviour!

But God doesn't look at it from man's angle. God looks at it from His angle. And when God looks at it, He has only one word for us.....sinners. That's the word He has for you.....

.....and the person alongside of you.....

.....and the person in front of you.....

....and the person in back of you.....

.....and that's the word He has for me....and for everybody else!

From His vantage point in heaven above, when God looks down upon earth, He sees only one thing.....every single one of us is a sinner. That's why, I shall say to you again, as I have said before, the first item on the agenda, whenever we Christians in a Lutheran church come together to worship, is this matter of our sin. That's why the first page and one-half deals specifically with the fact that those of us who're here are sinners in the sight of God...and God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, forgive us! We can't go on to anything else until we have this assurance that we are sinners.

But why is it that we don't call ourselves sinners as frequently as God calls us sinners? Why is it that, generally speaking now, most of us think ourselves quite decent and honorable--fairly well-satisfied with ourselves? It's only occasionally that we meet someone who seems to be batting his head against a stone wall and sees no hope for himself. But pew by pew, and person by person, it might be surprising to some other people if they could know how highly we regard ourselves. And maybe the first thing that we ought to ask God to do is to save us from our insensitivity to the sins that so easily beset us. The tenden-

cy on our part to find fault--to become critical of anything that isn't exactly to my liking...whether it be in my wife, in our children, in my boss, in my church, in my neighbor.....the liberties that we allow ourselves to take on the role of judge and critic...the ease by which we permit ourselves to withdraw--to separate ourselves, even in our thinking, if not in an actual deed, from something against which we have no right to form the opinion that we harbor in our heart. All the time we're doing this, we remain completely insensitive to the fact that our attitude and our withdrawal can be damaging to other people.....and to the thing, perhaps, that we ourselves need most in our lives.

Once I met an old man who had shepherded a congregation for what seemed an interminable period of time. And his frank confession was this: that the thing that weighed heavily upon his heart more than anything else was the insensitivity on the part of his people to the harm that they were doing to the Kingdom of God....their insensitivity.

And what was it our Blessed Lord said?--hanging upon the cross, with His love so great for mankind....."Father, forgive them, for they don't know.".....insensitive--to the very sin of which they are a part--to the very sin that they themselves commit.

Maybe it would be a helpful thing if we'd take a lesson from the candle on the Advent wreath....the candle gives light quietly, and the candle gives its light to whatever it is that's closest at hand. Maybe this Advent we'd better ask the Holy Spirit to light the candle of truth in our hearts; that by the light of the truth of God we might see the ~~king~~<sup>sins</sup> that so easily beset us.

"That We Should Be Saved" (7)

God comes to save us from our sins. And we can never recognize Jesus Christ as Saviour until we see ourselves as the sinners that we are. Well that's what Zacharias was talking about..."God isn't unmindful of us....God's going to come to earth--and when God does come to earth, He's going to concern Himself with the only thing that's important....and that's the salvation from our sins".

And then do you know what that man Zacharias did? He remembered his ~~own~~ son, John, and he put his son John squarely in the middle of all of his thinking. He had asked God for a son and when God heard the prayer of Zacharias and Elizabeth and gave them John, now Zacharias says....."and my son John--he's going to tell other people about this God...He's going to be a proclaimer of God's love and God's truth." And that's exactly what John the Baptist did. Everywhere he went, he kept reminding people that God was going to come to earth, and when God would come, he'd offer salvation. And to get them ready for it, he asked them to repent...."See yourself the sinner that you are, and then you'll be able to claim Christ the Saviour that He is."

This is the message that I bring to you on the first Sunday in Advent. Jesus is coming. This is the meaning of Advent....He is coming.....He is coming.....He is coming to knock at the door of my heart. Will I see Him as Saviour? Will I claim Him as Redeemer? Zacharias said....."He's coming for only one purpose--He wants to save you." This is the only hope. No one else can save us from our sins.

Man is wise.....

Man is loving, to a degree.....

And man can exercise a great deal of power.....  
....But only God can save us from our sins.

"That We Should Be Saved" (8)

Maybe we ought to make a two-fold prayer.....

"Dear God, by Thy Holy Spirit, show me the sinner  
that I am.....

And then, Heavenly Father, open my eyes to  
receive Jesus Christ as He is....."

Then when Christmas comes, there needn't be any doubt in your  
mind at all why God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten  
Son.

*"and dear God, if I am to receive Jesus Christ  
in my heart, bless me by Thy Holy Spirit  
to be daily purged of all sinful thoughts and  
desires, that it may be a fit dwelling-place  
for Him."*

"THE HOLY FAMILY - JOSEPH"

This is the first in a series of three Advent sermons based upon the general theme, "The Holy Family," the text, the 16th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph  
and the babe lying in a manger."

According to the custom of the church, Advent is the time set aside when the faithful spiritually prepare themselves for the journey to Bethlehem; and perhaps this year, as we become Bethlehem-bound, we can better appreciate what we will find in this quiet Judean village.

The ones who made that first journey to Bethlehem, when they came to journey's end, found three people--they found the members of the Holy Family, Mary, Joseph, the Babe lying in a manger. Now, as is true in many instances, some members of some families receive greater recognition than other members. We have a way of talking, sometimes, more about one person in a family circle than we have the remaining members of that group. Whatever the reason may be, this happens quite frequently. We have no desire, any of us at any time, to take the central light away from Jesus Christ, the member of the Holy Family. But only for a moment this morning, in passing, if you please, won't you take a good long look with me at one member of that Holy Family who not always receives his just due. We talk ever so much about Mary...and reverently we refer to her as the mother of our Lord. But sometimes with hesitation we talk about Joseph, His earthly father. Why haven't we given Joseph his just recognition? There may be a number of reasons. One may be that there's scant ref-

erence made to Joseph. Even when you read the New Testament it is only in chapters one and two of either Matthew or Luke that you find practically any reference made to Joseph at all. Maybe you can count six verses in which the name of Joseph appears. Maybe only rarely, at some other point, is reference made to Joseph.

I've read these references--every single one of them. And I said to myself, what does this reference say to me concerning Joseph? And if I were to put all of them together, what, now, is the picture of Joseph that I get? What manner of man was he? I suggest that perhaps some time during the day, some time during the week, as required Bible reading for your own spiritual discipline, you might want to read chapters one and two of either Matthew or Luke, and find for yourself the references made to Joseph. And if you should do this, you might come out at the same place where I've come. And this is the picture of Joseph as I see him.

First of all, I'm constrained to say, he was the kind of man that God was willing to trust. God knows all about us, you know. God knows our good points--God knows our bad points--God knows our noble intentions--God knows our earnest desires.....and God also knows how we never fully measure up to all that we ought to do.....God, more than anyone else, knows our incapacibilities, to say nothing of our basic weaknesses.

Now, once upon a time, God looked this whole world over, and there was a man, Joseph by name; and God, so it would seem to us, sees that of all the men on the face of the earth...."Joseph, it's you--you are the one I choose to be the earthly father to that most priceless of all gifts that I'm going to bestow upon my world...." This is where we ought to begin whenever we think about Joseph. He was the kind of man that God could trust. He was the kind of man that God could trust with the most wonderful thing that heaven could ever give

to earth. If you didn't know anything else about Joseph, that's enough, to remember him with reverence and respect.

The second thing that occurs to me when I read these references about Joseph in the accounts of the Gospel record, is that he was the kind of man who was sensitive to God himself. Now, this is something to say about a man. When people think about church work, sometimes they're prone to write it off in a woman's name. Generally speaking, more women attend more church meetings than men. Generally speaking, and why it has to be that way, I'm not quite sure, women are more willing and eager to subscribe to what the church may stand for than men sometimes may be willing to subscribe to. Maybe, we say, women have a kind of insight that men do not possess. A woman's intuition, in religion, becomes spiritual perception that has an edge on man's. There are those who tell us that you can build a case like that. I'm not pleading for it or against it. But I am here to say that Joseph was the kind of person who did have spiritual perception. He was the kind of man who was sensitive to the voice of God.

One reads in the Gospel record, that on more than one occasion God came to him, and God spoke, and he knew it to be the voice of God. Even in his sleeping hours, God had a way of revealing His truth to him. Several times references are made that "God appeared to Joseph in a dream." God can't make contact with people who are not spiritually sensitive. God can't get through to people unless they be in tune with Him. When you evaluate the character of Joseph, don't you dare overlook the fact that he was a man sensitive to God.....and is there any glory greater than this---to become the kind of person who is spiritually sensitive?

And this, too, we must say about Joseph.....that having heard the voice of God....having become spiritually sensitive to the Divine---once God told him to do something, he obeyed. Joseph was a man that God trusted. Joseph was a man



to whom God would reveal Himself. Joseph was a man, having once received a revelation, and if obedience was involved, Joseph was the kind of man who obeyed. It's a precious thing to read in the Gospel record how God spoke both to Mary and to Joseph; and I have reason to believe that Joseph took Mary as his wife, not only because he loved her as a man has a love for a woman, but because basically he was directed by God to love her. This is an exceedingly precious thing---to love another human being because you have God's directive for it.

Did it ever occur to you, how difficult it really was for Joseph to love Mary? Now, don't make too much of that statement. But remember how the Gospel record has it. Something had happened to Mary, and the revelation had been made to Mary before it was made to Joseph....and Mary had heard the great Voice of God before God had revealed Himself to Joseph.....and there are some things that Mary knew in her heart that she herself seemed incapable of ever telling to Joseph. Now, over against this thing, God says to Joseph...."You take her as your wife....and you love her--you protect her."

Joseph was the kind of man who, having received a directive from God, even though he might not be fully able to understand it, he obeyed. In the dream, the directive comes from God to Joseph....."Joseph, after the birth of Jesus, you go down to Egypt....."

.....go down to Egypt?---hundreds upon hundreds of miles away from his home town?.....

.....to take a chunk of years out of my life?....and to begin all over again?.....

"Dear God, we don't know anyone in Egypt." /s/...  
..."Dear God, we don't know what the situation will be like!...."

"Dear God, I have my business established back there in Nazareth.....to go down to Egypt and to start all over again!----and to do it because somewhere in the

night you hear a voice!.....

.....this is not the advice of your friends.....

.....this is not the advice of some people whose wisdom you respect....

.....this is God speaking to a man!

Whatever else you may say about Joseph, be sure to include this....he was the kind of person to whom God made a revelation; and in the course of that revelation, God waits for the response of Joseph....and the only response He wants is obedience.

"This is my plan, Joseph.....you may not be able to figure it out....you may not understand it.....but, Joseph, i'm telling you to go down into Egypt."

God gave him a hint as to the reason why. But even there, Joseph was not capable of including it in the total scheme of things. And even if he had any kind of understanding, think of the reluctance....."to begin all over again!--in a strange situation, in a strange land--and for a reason not of my making!".....and then also to be told....."Joseph, you stay down there until you get word from me again." To face life on the basis of all this uncertainty! To do one thing for God is something, but to get so involved that you can't make another move until God breaks through to you--well that's the kind of man Joseph was.....a man that God said...."I can trust.".....a man that God knew would be sensitive to what God would reveal to him.....a man who, once it was revealed to him, would obey.

Just for a moment today, you see, we're taking our eyes away from the other two in the family, the Holy Family, to concentrate upon Joseph. Now, the most wonderful of all things to be said about Joseph is what I'm about to share with you now. There came a time in the life of Jesus. Having become an adult now, the years of Nazareth all behind Him, He was the Itinerant Preacher---the Great Miracle-Worker---the Recruiter of men for the Kingdom.....and one day, one of the disciples came to Him and said...."Lord, teach us how to pray."

And Jesus knew full well that their prayer life would be effective only as

they could really understand the basic character of God. And Jesus said,

"Whenever you pray, be sure that you use the right name for God--the name that best describes all that He is..." and Jesus said,

"Whenever you pray, say 'Our Father'."

In my understanding of Jesus, Jesus never said anything finer or better about Joseph, than by implication He made this wonderful reference. Somewhere in the life of Jesus as a lad in Nazareth, He had discovered in this man standing by Him at the carpenter's bench, ever so much that made it easy for Him to think of God as a father. Somewhere during those years in Nazareth, when Jesus was growing as a child, in later years of adolescence, even unto manhood--year by year, standing at the side of Joseph, there wasn't a single thing about Joseph that made it difficult for Jesus to share with us at a subsequent time a figure of speech by which we could think about God. Is it too much to believe that Joseph, as an earthly being, was the channel for the wisdom from on high? Is it too much to believe that Joseph was the good provider?....is it too much to believe that Joseph, the one who counseled with his son and guided him --- who spent ever so much time with him.....should have so marked the fabric of his mind that whenever Jesus thought about God, and wanted to give us the best figure of speech, he thought in terms of the father-like qualities of a man named Joseph.

Martin Luther, you know, had a very uncomfortable feeling when he prayed the Lord's Prayer. He could hardly get by the opening words--'Our Father'; because every time he prayed the Pater Noster, every time he said, "Our Father", he had an unfortunate memory of his own father who treated him cruelly, without patience, without love, without understanding.

Not so Jesus Christ. When He came to think about God and He wanted to give you and me a figure of speech which, within our limitations, could best describe

"The Holy Family - Joseph" (7)

all that God is, Joseph was never a stumbling-block to that concept.

To those of us who are fathers, God has given us no greater responsibility than to be the kind of person who, when a child of ours may think of God, he will not find it difficult to use the word, 'Father.'

"THE HOLY FAMILY - JOSEPH"

Scriptural references - -

"And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

- Matthew 1:16

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

- Matthew 1:18 (Luke 1:27)

"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily."

- Matthew 1:19

"But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

-Matthew 1:20

"Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife."

- Matthew 1:24

" - - the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word."

- Matthew 2:13

" - - But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt - "

- Matthew 2:19

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judaea unto the city of David which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David)."

- Luke 2:4

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger."

- Luke 2:16

"And Joseph and his mother knew not of it - -"

- Luke 2:43

" - - thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

- Luke 2:48

"The Holy Family - Joseph"

(Scriptural references-2)

"And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age -  
(being as was supposed) the son of Joseph - "  
- Luke 3:23)

"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious  
words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said,  
Is not this Joseph's son?"

- Luke 4:22

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the  
prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."  
- John 1:45 (John 6:42)

December 11, 1960

"THE HOLY FAMILY - MARY"

This morning's sermon is the second in a series of three based upon the general theme, "The Holy Family."

It is true, and never to be forgotten of course, that the central figure of the Holy Family is Jesus Christ. But for a moment or two, last Sunday and again today, we're going to focus our attention on one of the other members of that family circle. Last Sunday we took a good, long look at Joseph. Today, in much the same way, let us consider the second in that series of three--Mary, reverently referred to as the mother of Our Lord.

Now, what can I tell you about her? Very much as was true for the study on Joseph, we shall deal with the scant references made to Mary, only eight or ten perhaps, in the first and second chapters of the Gospel according to Matthew, and also true for the first and second chapters of the Gospel according to Luke. By looking a bit at this verse and then at that verse, and drawing together the total impression that remains, we have something of a composite picture, and thereby, perhaps, one can share with someone else something of the manner of woman that she was---Mary, mother of Our Lord.

But before we do that today, may I remind you what you ought already to know, that God, when He sees fit to work, -- to work a wonderful thing -- invariably seems to choose a human being to help Him. There's no mistaking the fact that God can work through the earthquake, the wind and the fire---God can move the very forces of nature, and then almost shout, or perhaps whisper in the wind--how He wants us to pay attention to Him, and what it is that He wants us to know.....but when God chooses to speak most effectively, again and ever so often, He reaches for a human being, and He says....."I want to work through

"The Holy Family - Mary" (2)

you.....what I am about to accomplish, I can't possibly accomplish unless I have someone just like you."

There are some things, my friend, that God can't possibly do by Himself. If they are to be done, He will need someone to help Him. In the plan that He had for all mankind, in His design to invade His world, He needed two people. What He was about to accomplish, He could not possibly accomplish without a Mary and without a Joseph.

Now what were they like? Today, what manner woman was Mary? What can I tell you about her? Well, let me say this to you at the very beginning concerning Mary--it may startle you for the moment, but it seems to me the only logical point at which to begin.....Mary?....characterize her this way: she was a good woman in a bad town. Nazareth did not enjoy a wonderful reputation, and I think I know the reason why. Nazareth wasn't far from what might have been referred to as the cross-roads of the world--at least the then-known world in Asia Minor.

They tell us that when Jesus was a boy, He might have climbed to the top of a hill beyond Nazareth and there, looking out as far as He could see, He could see the caravan route---men and women interested in the commerce of the world....on the march.....

.....dollars in motion.....

.....trade on pilgrimage.....

.....people giving themselves to buying and selling.....  
and because Nazareth wasn't too far removed from that main artery, many people came to Nazareth and put up for the night, and Nazareth experienced all of the vice that a great city might know, and all the vice that men are prone to be party to when they're away from home....as they travel, and the restraint of family life might be



lifted.....as they travel, and the conditioning factors for good no longer present from the established community of which they are a part---it's easy to do things that are downright wicked by nature, when you're traveling away. Name the sins of a commercial city, or a city that thrives upon the benefits of commerce, rather, and Nazareth had it. In a city as wicked as that---wicked enough-wicked enough that someone once said, when they were referring to Jesus Christ, with consternation and amazement...."Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"... ....so the town was known.....Mary--a good woman---in a bad town.

It is possible to be good in a wicked environment--it's not easy, but it's possible. I remember my predecessor in that Pennsylvania town, being confronted by a woman whom he had taken to task because of his love in his heart for every single member of his flock; and with a true shepherd's concern, he asked her why she was doing the type of thing that she was doing.....and she said, "Well, what do you expect?.....Would you really think that I could be any different kind of a person than I am, knowing where I lived and on what side of the tracks I was brought up?.....Pastor, would you really expect me to be any different?" So people talk to us, and so, with charity in our hearts perhaps, we write off their misdemeanor and their misbehavior. They are the result of what surrounds them.

It may be true that God can never judge us alone--it may be true that God will always see us against the background of which we are a part.....but that does not allow us to think for a single minute that God will ever free us from such a thing that's called personal responsibility...The integrity and the initiative that ought to swell from within a man. It may not be easy to be good in a bad town, but it's possible. And if you're inclined to make a patron saint out of Mary, you might be entitled to do it on that score---call her the "Patron Saint of All Who Find it Possible to be Good in Bad Places."

The second thing that one might be able to say about Mary is this: that while it is true that she was good in a wicked city, she just didn't get that way, either. Mary did not drop full-fashioned from heaven, the doctrine of the immaculate conception notwithstanding. Mary did not drop full-fashioned from heaven. Mary, orphaned, so we are told, was as good as she was for one reason---it may be a matter of conjecture....would you be willing to say that she had godly parents who influenced her that way?--whose impression upon her life was so vital that she ~~xxxxxxxx~~ remained as pure as she did?--orphaned as she was?

I remember meeting a man to whom I once had the good fortune to serve as a pastor---a truly remarkable man, he lived almost to be a hundred--but that was not the mark of distinction---age itself does not come as a crowning glory....

.....it's the kind of person you remain.....

.....it's the kind of person you become, once the years have run  
their course .....

.....it's not that you're 85---it's the kind of person you  
are at 85.....

....this grand old man--so reverently would I refer to him.....remarkable in his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the things of the Kingdom---the type of man who was willing to write sacrifice into the vocabulary of his soul...  
....why, my predecessor told me, when they were building their first church, he was the kind of man who said, "Pastor, the thing that you want us to do in this parish is significant enough that my family will sacrifice---one pair of shoes less, perhaps, and butter--we shall not have it! We shall eat plain, bare bread".  
....this type of thing!--of another generation! I'm not so sure that there's too many of their kind remaining, but this is beside the point for the moment.

I said to his daughter once, "How do you account for a man like your father?".....and immediately she replied, "Well, you should have known grandfather---my grandfather was a very remarkable man, too". Well, to get a father like hers, you begin with a father like his.

Now I'll grant you, it doesn't always work that way. But very frequently it works that way, and it's still God's preferred method, by which basic character and integrity is fashioned within the confines of a family. I like to think that Mary became the kind of woman she was because of the stalk from which she stemmed. And I say to you this morning---tell me what a man thinks of his wife, how he treats her, and I'll tell you the kind of a woman his daughter will become.

This, too, I think I can say about Mary: she was a woman, strange as it may seem, who was not too startled when God made His revelation through the angel Gabriel. Oh, she was wondering how God was going to do all that He said He was going to do, but she was sensitive enough to the leading of God, that when God spoke to her through a messenger, she recognized God's voice. Now, how did that happen? It happened because all through her life, Mary must have had more than a speaking acquaintance with God....it happened because all through her life God was something more than a casual relationship. If you want God to be genuinely real to you in some great and significant moment, then learn to meet Him in the insignificant moments of life, if you please.

But when that great moment came, and God looked over the face of the earth and He needed a woman, to be the mother to His priceless gift to the world.....when He needed one person, who could become nearest and dearest in this world to the Lord Jesus Christ...He found Mary. When it was revealed to her, she responded, and she submitted herself to His will. She sang a song after it all happened....."My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath

"The Holy Family - Mary" (6)

rejoiced in God my saviour; he hast beheld the low estate of his handmaiden: from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Would you allow me to add this parenthetically.....where do you suppose Mary was, when God made this wonderful revelation to her? I used to think that she was on her knees--devout, pious woman that she was--and maybe so.....but now I'm inclined to think that there could have been a chance that she was busy at work.....orphan--having to work day by day---maybe it was because she was busy doing something acceptable in the sight of God, that God even rewarded her with a revelation while she was busy at work. God sometimes comes to us when we are on our knees, but we ought to be the kind of person, that God can speak to us anywhere, at any time. It is well that we note, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night".....while they were given to a noble task, they heard the angels' song.....while Gideon was threshing, he got the command from the Lord. Mary might say to us, "Is your daily work as honorable and as decent as all that?---that God himself wouldn't hesitate to speak to you with a setting such as that?"

I haven't said anything to you much about the immaculate conception....I haven't said a word to you about the fact that our Roman brethren maintain that when Mary died, she was bodily assumed up into heaven---this I would not teach---this I would not proclaim---I have no authority for it.....and it would seem to me that when men emphasize this fact concerning Mary--when they allow her to drop full-fashioned from heaven and return the same way---they rob us of something of the glory that is rightfully Mary's. Mary was flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood.....she was human.....and the miracle of miracles concerning Mary may not be so much the virgin birth, as Mary herself---a faith by which to respond!--to God's gracious visitation.

"The Holy Family - Mary" (7)

God, from heaven, looks over the face of the earth. A miracle of miracles is about to take place, and to accomplish it....."I need a Mary....I need a Joseph." There are some things that even God can't do by Himself. And the moral of the story of the Holy Family could be this: God himself is the only one who knows how much good is withheld from this world because He can't find enough people.....like a Joseph.....like a Mary.

"THE HOLY FAMILY - JESUS"

"They came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger."

This is the last in a series of sermons based upon the general theme, "The Holy Family." And Sunday by Sunday, during this Advent-tide, we've been focusing our attention upon one member of the Holy Family in particular. Reserved for this Sunday nearest to Christmas, before it should come, is the sermon that deals with the central figure in the Family--Jesus Christ.

Let me begin by telling you that I remember what I now recall as though it happened last night. It happened several years ago, in fact. A small group of us had been invited to visit in the home of a man who had much of this world's goods. In fact, for many of us, his income in a year or two would be as much as some of us might ever earn in a lifetime. He lived in the wealthier section of town and his house was as nice, as splendid, as became his reputation.

As soon as we went near the house on that Christmas-tide, we saw it--almost a riot in color, from the dooryard down to the main gate, some 300 feet, perhaps, distance---many Christmas decorations; and each of the many rooms in the house had a candle burning in its window. And when we entered the home, we were guided and directed to the large living room, where the greater section of the living room was given to his Christmas display. Name almost any thing that any youngster would want to find in a Christmas display, and it was there--any number of trains, so it would seem--any number of gadgets.....

...And my friend who stood nearest me whispered, "For shame!...for shame!" Why was he saying that? Because his eye had suddenly fallen upon the manger scene, relegated to a most insignificant spot---underneath the train platform,

if you please, barely to be seen.

"For shame!" my friend said...."For shame!" For Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ.....and relegated to an insignificant spot--a reminder of the first holy night.

With sadness in my heart I tell you that this was symptomatic of my friend. Moral and spiritual deterioration had already set itself in the soul of that man. By this time much of his world's goods have disappeared. Separated from his loved ones, he'll be spending this Christmas as he spent last Christmas and the Christmas before.....in loneliness. The moral is clear.

They tell me that not too many years ago they were preparing a nativity scene which was to be part of a dramatic production on Broadway. And at a certain point in the production, all the lights in the auditorium were to be extinguished except one soft light that would pin-point the manger scene, and there in the cradle, a soft, delicate light would be focused upon the face of Jesus Christ. The stage hands, the operators of the switches had been told what to do. Unfortunately, when the great moment came, the entire auditorium was darkened, totally so. The man at the switches had forgotten his instructions. And someone, in a stage whisper--yet to be heard in the third or fourth row of the auditorium, had said....."Hey, you--you've switched off Jesus!---get the light back on him quickly!" This, too, is parabolic. Central in the nativity scene is the figure of Jesus Christ. And you can't possibly keep Christmas without recognizing Jesus Christ. Now you may concern yourself with a lot of other things, but even as you can't spell Christmas without Christ, so you can't keep Christmas without Christ.....and the purpose of this sermon is to focus your attention upon the central figure in the Holy Nativity---it is Jesus Christ.

This sermon also serves as a warning....you are not simply to see a babe. Wise men would never have fallen in adoration in front of a baby who

"The Holy Family - Jesus" (3)

would remain a baby. Wise men knelt in adoration and presented their gifts because they saw what the baby would become. Now you and I aren't keeping Christmas as it was kept the first Christmastide---it's impossible for us to turn back the pages of time or the pages of a history book. Ours is the necessity and the holy obligation to keep Christmas--1960.....and while you may focus your attention upon the nativity scene and see the Babe lying in a manger, with all the solemnity that comes with one charged with the responsibility as a guardian for your soul, I would remind you that that Baby grew up....and you and I have to do business, not with a baby in a manger, but with the Christ of God who became a man.

It's Stephen Vincent Benet, isn't it, who has that striking poem in which he tells about Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln. She died, you know, when Abraham Lincoln was but a boy. And in this poem, she comes eagerly to the gate of Heaven....and to every newcomer who enters the gate she puts pretty much the same series of questions.....

....."Tell me, when you were down on earth, did you ever get to know my son?

....."What became of him, do you know?

....."Did he get a chance to grow up? - Did he become a man?

....."And when he became a man, what did he do?....."

This is the question that you and I might well put to ourselves. This Baby that we reverently adore as part of the manger scene---are you remembering that He did grow up?....are you remembering that He did become a man?---a man who had thunder in His voice?--fire in His eyes?....a man who told people about the terrible consequences of sin?.....a man who would tell them that there was such a thing as the possibility of going to hell?.....a man who told them that



"The Holy Family - Jesus" (4)

they didn't have to go to hell---that they could be saved?---and there was such a thing as heaven?....and that no one could come to God except as they might come through Him?

We do well to remember that this child grew up and became a man who met people along the sin-stained pathway of life, and never completely discredited any one of them.....who could look them straight in the eye as He pierced the depth of their heart and could say..."God loves you. And to prove it--I'm here! And if I have to die, it's because I'm breaking my heart and giving it-- --to prove this!"

Christmas, 1960, is vastly different from that first Christmas, as well it should be. But I come to warn you this morning.....you're not reckoning with a baby in a manger. You're reckoning with the baby that became a man. Not just any man----the God-Man! We give our allegiance to Him! We adore Him! We claim His love! This is the miracle of miracles---that it should ever have happened at all!.....and to know that it can happen now!---not in a stable, but in the Bethlehem of a man's heart.

"NO SURPRISE TO GOD"

The sermon bears the title, "No Surprise to God", and the text, the 16th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

No matter how you look at it, that first Christmas was just one surprise after another. It all began as a surprise.....

....a surprise when Zecharias, a noble man of God, doing his priestly duty, was surprised that God should speak to him and tell him an exceedingly wonderful thing---that he and his beloved Elizabeth should have a child. They had given up hope, and now this news had come.....

....Elizabeth--she, too, knew all of this as a matter of surprise. For the angel of God came to her, and told her that it would be her son who should be given the high and noble task to proclaim to the then-known world that Jesus Christ was going to come.....

....a surprise to Joseph.....

....a surprise for Mary--peasant girl that she was.....

"You, Mary....of all the people---God is choosing you!"

....."My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour: for he hath beheld me!".....

can't you hear her saying it? "Me!....God hath chosen me!

....the surprise of my life--that God should deem me worthy!"

....shepherds, watching their flock by night---the heavens  
are parted!....an angelic host appears!....the good news  
is first sung to them....surprised!...astonished!...amazed!  
No matter how you look at it, the word for that first Christmas....

.....Surprise!.....Surprise!.....Surprise!.....

....and Joseph, surprised, as the end of that tiresome journey  
they should have to have the accommodation which they did....

....Mary, surprised that she should be treated this way!

....Mary, surprised to discover that shepherds, coming now,  
would kneel and make of a feed-trough an altar!....  
surprised?---that three men, coming to the end of a wander-  
ing star, should bring their gifts and present them before  
a baby!---born of peasant stock, Mary.

No matter how you look at it, my friend, that first Christmas, one sur-  
prise after another.....

And I can remember when I used to think to myself....how sur-  
prised God must have been when this happened.....no room!

"Didn't they know I was coming?

"Hadn't I told them, one generation after another?

"Hadn't there been one prophet following upon another prophet  
to tell them that some day God would come?

"And then when the night of nights does come to pass, there  
should be no room!....."

I used to think that God was surprised. But this was no sur-  
prise for God. Luke, the narrator of Christmas, is perfectly right

when he simply puts it this way: "And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger: because there was no room in the inn..".....a very matter-of-fact statement. Luke gives us no reason to be amazed at this at all. As though it was the expected thing. It was no surprise to God that His son should be born in a manger, in a feed-trough, for you see, God knows us. God knew all the time that we'd be so busy.....

....God knew all the time that we'd be talking about any one of a number of different things--why God knew that in that inn, men would be there, talking in the late hours of the night, ..and they'd be discussing the present generation.... ..and they'd be recalling how Bethlehem was in their day, and how strangely different now.....

....God knew all the time that they'd be talking about taxes---the increasing rate---the oppressive burden.....

....God knew all the time that on that night of nights, they'd be busying themselves, talking about the threat of war.... ..the possibility of an economic recession.....

....God knew all the time that they'd be so busy.....

....God knew that there wouldn't be any room for His son in the inn....God was prepared. Knowing human nature as He does, God says, "All right, I'll take whatever you have to offer.....

"You shan't give me your best....innkeeper, you won't ask anyone to go out into the cold for my Son?....Innkeeper, what do you have left?....an unoccupied space--between two cows?---- you're willing to edge the donkey over to the side a bit?--it

will give me just space enough?---I'll take it!"

It was no surprise for God. God is always prepared to claim the little that we have to offer. And this is part of the wonderful meaning of Christmas.....

"No room in the inn...a place in the manger?--I'll take it!"

Christmas, 1960, could be pretty much the same as that first Christmas. We, too, are busy. There's so much that has a claim upon our lives. We're talking about this....we're talking about that. All the while God is waiting....waiting....waiting.

God says, "Give me five minutes in the course of the day....if that's all you have to offer--give me five minutes--I'll take it!"

"...you have seven days in the week...you're only willing to give me one day out of seven?--I'll take it!..."

God is waiting....God is prepared....this is no surprise to God! If you only have a tiny bit of space....if you only have a small chunk of time....God says...."I'll claim it!"

On that first Christmas, He only asked for space enough where Mary could put to sleep a tiny babe....."Let me have that much, and I'll begin with it....."

This is what God is always saying to us, and this is much of the meaning of Christmas that goes on day by day and year by year. God claiming the unexpected---God claiming the insignificant---God saying, "Give me just a little."

God knows human nature that well. It's so seldom that we'll ever offer Him the best. It's so seldom that we'll offer Him the finest that we have. And God is prepared, therefore, to take the little that remains.

"No Surprise To God" (5)

A youngster in the slum section of a city holds in his hand a fragmentary section of a mirror; and he's standing down there on the corner, and he's twisting that glass and that mirror, and then he's ~~shoo~~ shooting a bit of the sunlight up yonder in that back room in the tenement....he has a sister who's up there, sick. She may not get well. He wants to give her a bit of the sunlight---just a bit of God's sun! An insignificant youngster. God uses him, insignificant, a moment, catching a ray of the sun, and it brightens her whole day--brightens her whole life.

This is the message that I bring to you on this holy night.

"And she brought forth her first born son, wrapped  
him in swaddling clothes, laid him in a manger;  
because there was no room for them in the inn."

God says to you and to me...."I know you so well....you won't  
give me your best....give me what you will....let me  
have a chance with it....let me make a beginning..."

As the shepherd and Bishop of your souls, this is the price-  
less gift that you could give to God this holy night---five minutes  
in the next twenty-four hours, in which you give God the right to  
claim this fragmentary section of your life. Let Him begin all over  
again.....and then, you know what? .....

....you'll be in for the surprise of your life, for God  
Himself alone knows what He can do, if only you give  
Him a chance to begin.

"THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS"

The sermon on this Christmas Day in the morning is entitled, "The Meaning of Christmas," and as a text the 15th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethle-hem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

What can I tell you this Christmas Day in the morning is the meaning of Christmas? Perhaps this text, if we examine it carefully and closely, will speak to that very point.

To begin with, Christmas is something which is initiated in the mind and in the spirit of God. Christmas was God's idea. God had decided to do something for us. God had decided to prove to us that He loves us---with a kind of love the world could never give--and to offer through that love the kind of peace which the world could never take away. God wants us to know this, and God had His heavens parted and His angel choir proclaim it; and there are some people who heard it. Now, you begin at that point. God has something to offer us....God has something to say....God wants to share with us a great idea.....and then He tells it to some people.

Not everyone heard it--not everyone saw the star--only some people. There were shepherds abiding in the fields watching their flocks by night. They were the ones who heard the angels' song. I shan't belabor the point now as to why it was that the shepherds first heard. I shan't ask you to discuss in your own mind the very

"The Meaning of Christmas" (2)

intriguing question such as this:

.....why didn't carpenters hear it first of all?

....or better still--why didn't the priests in the temples?

why didn't the men falling upon their knees? why didn't

the men who stood before the altar?....why weren't they

the first ones to hear the good news?.....

We shan't take time to deal with a question as intriguing as any one of these. We must hasten on.

God had His heavens parted, His choir sang....there were some people who heard it, and when they heard it, they had to respond--- you just don't ignore God. When God said, "Listen! I have something to tell you"---you just don't pay Him any less attention, but rather you pay Him more. And so one has to remember when he comes to deal with the meaning of Christmas, that once God speaks to us, we are in duty bound to respond. That's why the text says the shepherds said one to another....."Well, let's go now unto Bethlehem--let's see!.... God's finger is pointing the way....God is beckoning to us--we can't stay here any longer---let's get on the road!" When you come to think about the meaning of Christmas, you can say for yourself:  
Point One: It was all God's idea and God first told us about it, and once He told us about it, we can't stand still---we have to follow through.

The second thing that comes quickly to mind is this: that Christmas itself is like a journey. And by the way, whenever you think of Christmas, you think occasionally about making a trip, don't you? Twenty-some years ago, had you been in the service, and you



"The Meaning of Christmas" (3)

hoped and prayed that there could be such a thing as a furlough for you that would take you home for Christmas. There are some of you here right now, who last September went off to the college campus. You were counting the days from the time you first set foot on the college campus, until December would come when you could be 'home for Christmas'. You can't quite think about Christmas without thinking about making a journey. It was that way from the very beginning.....

.....wise men made a journey to Bethlehem---they went from where they were to where they saw the star lead them....

.....shepherds left their fields and went to Bethlehem....

.....Mary and Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem.....

.....God made the journey from heaven to earth!.....

Let us now make this journey to Bethlehem. This, too, is part of the meaning of Christmas---it's a journey. And you never quite experience the full meaning of Christmas by staying exactly where you are! Christmas does something to a person. It motivates into action---it takes you from your house to your neighbor's house---it takes you from your office into the hearts and the souls of your staff.....

....."Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass...."

This, too, is part of the meaning of Christmas....that when a person does make a journey, as far as Christmas is concerned, ~~when~~ he never makes the journey by himself. The journey is to be made in the company of other people. You can't travel the Christmas road alone...

.....wise men--three of them, so the legend has it.....

.....not one shepherd, but shepherds --a group of shepherds....

.....Mary and Joseph---together.

"The Meaning of Christmas" (4)

You can't think of Christmas without thinking of people, always two or more--never less than two, unless it happens to be one....

...Herod--and he was outside the Christmas spirit.....

.....the innkeeper--and he, too, was outside the Christmas story.....

but for all who would be a part of Christmas, it's always two or more---never less than two. You just can't keep Christmas by yourself.

I am constrained to share with you what I might have told you before....a very interesting story about a man who had about as tragic a blow hit him in life as any man could experience. Within a month before Christmas, in fact it was just while he was busy getting ready his shopping list for those whom he loved....to return to the house, only to discover that in an automobile accident, all of his family circle was taken away--he alone remained.

And on his way back from the cemetery he made a decision--he'd go through with his Christmas plans. No one could take Christmas out of his heart--not even life's cruel blow. And a day or two after that trip to the cemetery, he went to the pastor and he said, "Pastor, I think I should tell you that the news of the death of my loved ones came to me just when I was making my Christmas shopping list. I can't lose Christmas in the face of this sorrow. This is what I would like you to do....would you be good enough to make a list of some of the needy people that you know--and then I'd like to go shopping for them. And if you don't mind, I'd like you and your wife to go along with me--I'll be at your personage on Christmas Eve after your eight o'clock service."

## "The Meaning of Christmas" (5)

They came, and he himself, in the company of these two people, delivered all the packages. And when he got home he said, "You know, Pastor, three of us started out, but I never felt there were only the three of us--I felt there were the four of us. I just couldn't keep Christmas by myself."

This, too, is part of the meaning of Christmas...."Let us.."--never less than two--always two or more, who keep Christmas. Why even God couldn't keep Christmas by Himself--why even God couldn't keep it up there in heaven.

"And the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go unto Bethlehem, to see this thing which is come to pass."....and you know very well that when they got to Bethlehem, they saw the Christ Child.. ...and this, too, is the meaning of Christmas---you can't possibly keep Christmas, you can't possibly understand it, until at the end of your journey you see Christ. For some of us when we keep Christmas, we see ourselves. We are the recipients--someone else has given to us, and tonight it could be that we'll have happy thoughts, because we have been remembered. Some of us, when we keep Christmas, see other people--those whom we love, those upon whom we cherish our affection, and we'll have precious memories tonight that we hope we can recall in years to come, how they unwrapped the packages--how they told us it was just the thing that they had hoped that they would get--and so they did. Some of us, when we think of Christmas, will not easily forget their faces, nor their voices.

But wonderful as this may be, to keep Christmas on this level, I tell you, my friend, you do not keep Christmas if you see only your-

"The Meaning of Christmas" (6)

self, and even someone else, the object of your affection. Over and above all of this, to keep Christmas we have to see Jesus Christ. For Christmas really isn't so much what we do for one another--Christmas really isn't so much what other people do for us.....Christmas, after it's all said and done, is what we do for each other and what people do for us, because primarily what God has done for us. The meaning of Christmas is Christ.

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us....." Beloved, not everyone heard about the first Christmas. Not everyone has heard about Christmas this year. I'd like to think, and I'd be very happy to be as extravagant as I possibly can, that you and I are numbered among the select people who have heard and to whom the good news has been told. God has stirred our hearts.

Take the journey to Bethlehem. Keep it today, will you? And before the sunset comes, may you in true adoration, in one moment or another, in reverence and respect, catch something of the very face of God.

"And the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us....."

They didn't delegate someone else to go---they went themselves. And when they came to their journey's end, even the feed-trough became an altar.